MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JUNE 50c PDC

Exclusive!

THE WRONG ROOM

The **NEW**

MIKE SHAYNE

Short Novel by

BRETT HALLIDAY

THE BRAIN PICKERS

The **NEW**

KEVIN KAR

Spy Thriller by

MAX VAN DERVEER

ONE IS COMPANY

An Exciting Story by

JOHN A. ELBERT

"I Like Mike!"

So Say the Millions of Devoted Readers of the Toughest Private Eye in the Business

THE PROFUSELY illustrated *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* is the only publication in which you can read a brand new and especially written Mike Shayne story in every issue. Because it's often so difficult to get your favorite magazine on the present over-crowded newsstands we've worked out a fine bargain offer —two full years for only $8.00—enabling you to have the magazine delivered at your doorstep 24 consecutive months.

And on your regular murder-watching jaunt with Mike Shayne, you will encounter the hard-boiled, the refined, the psychological, the detective puzzle—everything in short or in long, from the bullet in the belly to the sealed room! If it's crime and good fiction, it's for Mike Shayne—so take a walk with the redhead every thirty days for lively story entertainment!

SUBSCRIBE NOW . . . RE-SUBSCRIBE NOW . . . for the biggest bargain of your crime-reading life. Two years—24 issues—yours for only $8.00, in United States currency, please. Please remit an additional dollar ($1.00) for Canada, Mexico, Pan American countries and all foreign countries.

RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
56 West 45th Street, New York, New York. 10036
Kindly enter my subscription to **MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE** for two years (24 issues) @ $8.00. Add $1.00 for foreign postage.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY, STATE, ZIP NO. .....

Please print **June—206**

MIKE SHAYNE

SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JUNE, 1967 VOL. 21, NO. 1

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

THE WRONG ROOM

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Silent, smiling—and quite dead—she waited for Mike Shayne to bring her killer to justice, the gay little lady who had run away to find love—and found a cunningly hidden murder trap instead.

. . . . . 2 to 53

TWO THRILLING NOVELETS

ONE IS COMPANY
JOHN A. ELBERT 64

THE BRAIN PICKERS
MAX VAN DERVEER 82

LEO MARGULIES
Publisher

CYLVIA KLEINMAN
Editorial Director

HOLMES TAYLOR
Associate Editor

SIX EXCITING STORIES

THE WISDOM OF THE WICKED
NORMAN DANIELS 54

ON THE FARM
BEATRICE SMITH 106

THE SHARPSHOOTERS
RICHARD O. LEWIS 116

SEE NO EVIL
GEORGE BELLEFONTAINE 126

HER WORLD OF VOICES
JAMES KcKIMMEY 131

INSTANT REAL
FRED S. TOBEY 136

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 21, No. 1. June, 1967. Published monthly by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. 56 W. 45th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) $6.00; Two Years (24 issues) $12.00; single copies 50¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious.
© 1967, by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America.
Postmaster—return 3579 to 56 W. 45th Street, New York, New York. 10036

THE WRONG ROOM

THE NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Somewhere in the danger-filled night Mike Shayne fought to find the answer to the little dancing lady who came to meet love—and met a bullet instead.

IT WAS AFTER ten o'clock at night when Mike Shayne eased his car into its usual spot in the garage beneath his apartment-hotel. Shayne had been with Will Gentry, cleaning up a case, and he was fatigued. He sat in the car and finished his cigarette for a moment before getting out and going up the back stairs to his apartment.

Shayne was thinking about four fingers of the best Martel cognac when he opened his door. He stopped thinking about the cognac, or anything else, the instant he was inside the door. He stopped being tired. The training of years told him at once that something was wrong. He came alert, half-crouched inside the door. He did not turn on the light. His grey eyes scanned the familiar room.

Then he saw her.

A small woman who sat in his high-backed leather easy chair and looked straight at him.

© 1967, by Brett Halliday

MIKE SHAYNE MEETS AN OLD ENEMY—DEATH

Shayne did not reach for his automatic. He stood, half-crouched in the dark inside the partly-open door and watched the woman in the chair. She sat back, her head against the back of the chair, her hands flat on the arms. She held no weapon.

"Who are you?" Shayne asked.

The woman did not answer.

"How the devil did you get in here?"

The woman seemed to smile.

Shayne watched her, took a step toward her, and saw that her smile did not change. Her head did not move. Her eyes stared not at him now but beyond him over his shoulder.

Eyes that saw nothing.

Shayne suddenly straightened up and strode quickly across the dark room to her. He touched her. She did not move or change.

The woman was dead.

Shayne turned on the small table lamp that stood on the table beside the high-backed leather arm chair in his living room. It glared on her dead face, reflected from the staring eyes that looked at nothing.

Shayne felt her. The body was still warm.

The redhead lit a cigarette and stepped back to look at her.

She was a small woman, pretty, perhaps twenty-five or even thirty. She was more than pretty, almost beautiful. Long blonde hair that had been arranged in a tight bun, as if the woman had wanted to hide her beauty. A very good figure. High heels. An expensive linen dress, green.

A pretty woman, almost voluptuous, dressed for appearing in some happy place. Dressed for pleasure, not work. And dead.

Shayne moved closer again, smoked. He looked at her hands. There were marks on her hands. Ugly mottled bruises. There were marks on her legs; round welts circled her ankles. A single large bruise marred her face, a bruise on her left cheekbone.

The woman had been in some kind of physical violence. Some violence that could have been an accident, and could have been intentional.

Shayne examined her body as close as he could. He found no wounds, or any indication of the cause of her death.

On the table beside the chair he saw the desk key to his apartment, a package of cigarettes, a small cigarette lighter, and the remains of three cigarettes in the ashtray. The cigarettes were not his.

Shayne rubbed his gaunt chin. The woman had sat in the chair long enough to smoke three cigarettes. There was no sign in the apartment of anyone else having been there.

Apparently she had come to his apartment under her own power and probably alone. Somehow she had got the key. She had sat in the chair waiting for him. And had died

where she sat of some cause he could not see.

Her purse was in her lap.

Shayne picked up the purse in a handkerchief and opened it. He dumped out the contents without touching them. There were keys, lipstick, a compact, matches from various New York and Miami night clubs, some swizzle sticks, a handkerchief, lipstick-stained kleenex, a packet of Kleenex, a wallet and change purse—and a small pistol!

Shayne examined the pistol. It was a tiny pearl-handled, .25 caliber job. It had not been fired. The safety was on, and it had been in the woman's purse.

He turned his attention to the wallet. It contained one hundred dollars in small bills, some change, the stub of an airline ticket from New York in the name of Janis Hill, and nothing else! Nothing else at all—no credit cards, no charge-a-plates, no identification, no photographs. It looked as though the wallet, which was not new, had been stripped.

Shayne left all the contents of the purse where they had fallen, and looked down at the dead woman. Janis Hill, if that were her name, had been waiting obviously for him. She had died while waiting.

He did not know her. How had she gotten the desk key?

If she had been waiting for him, why? If it had not been he she was waiting for, why was she in his apartment?

Shayne was puzzling all this out and did not hear the step behind him until almost too late.

A soft step.

In the instant that he whirled, Shayne realized that he had not closed his door!

The man came down on him like a falling wall.

Shayne saw a contorted face, a big fist, and that was all. He wasted no more time in looking but began fighting. He took the first punch high on the head, rolling with it.

Stunned, he reacted automatically to the right that would follow the left high on his head. He slipped down and away to his left.

The right hand punch slid over his right shoulder.

The man was no amateur and a quick left followed the missed right almost instantly. A hasty punch, more to keep Shayne off balance than to do damage.

Shayne saw it from his half-crouch, stepped up and in, took the left on his left shoulder, and planted a solid left counter inside the man's punch.

Shayne's left caught the attacker full on the face.

The man staggered, slipped off-balance.

Shayne chopped a short right to the attacker's face.

The man grunted, but came back on.

In the dim light of the apartment Shayne tried to see the face he was hitting. It was too dark by the light of the single table lamp to get more than a vague look in the heat of the action.

A big man with a swarthy face and close-set dark eyes.

That was all Mike Shayne saw. He was too busy setting his feet solid and meeting the man's returned attack with a quick left-right-left combination.

The man wilted, spat blood, legs buckling.

Shayne stepped in for the finisher.

But the attacker was definitely not an amateur. Despite his rubbery legs, the attacker managed a hard left and right that surprised Shayne. Neither punch hit solid, but they stopped the big redhead's advance.

Before he could move in again, the attacker kicked a table across his legs and Shayne almost went down.

The next instant the big, swarthy assailant was out the door.

Shayne kicked the table from his path and chased out into the corridor. The man was already at the door to the stairway. Shayne pounded after him. He reached the doorway and went through onto the stairway landing. He heard the man going down one floor below. Shayne started down the stairs fast.

A shot exploded below.

Mike Shayne skidded flat on his back.

The bullet struck over his head.

The redhead clawed for his automatic and listened. Then he heard it. The man was really no amateur. Shayne heard the light steps far below.

The man had fired, stopped running, and walked quietly on down, sure that Shayne would be pinned down by the shot and the threat of more shots.

Shayne stood up. He could not catch the man now. Slowly he turned and walked back up into his apartment. His grey eyes were narrowed in thought. He tugged on his left ear.

The body of the woman, Janis Hill, was still seated in the chair as if quietly waiting for someone. It was going to be a long wait for Janis Hill.

Shayne walked to his telephone and called down to the desk. Pete answered.

"You better call the police, Pete," the detective said grimly.

"I've got a very dead visitor up here."

"A murder, Mr. Shayne? In your rooms?!"

"I don't know about murder, and I don't know where it happened, but she died in my room. Call the police, and then come on up yourself."

"Yes, Mr. Shayne," Pete said.

Shayne hung up and lighted another cigarette. He looked around his dim room. He looked at the body of the pretty woman who he did not know but who had died in his best chair in his living room.

He wondered what room she had been supposed to die in, and how she had gotten to his chair?

II

PETE GAWKED at the dead woman. "Gosh, Mr. Shayne, I don't know how she got in here. She—she wasn't killed here?"

Shayne shook his head to the desk clerk. "No, I don't think so. She probably died from a blow of some kind, and there's no sign of violence here. It looks like she was waiting for someone, and I don't think it was me."

"You mean you think she got into the wrong apartment?" Pete said. The desk clerk was shaken by the sight of the body. He could not stop looking at her, so lifelike in the chair, her eyes open and bright. And yet when he looked he turned pale each time.

"That's what I think," Shayne said. "How did she get into my apartment?"

Pete shook his head. "I don't know, Mr. Shayne. She never came past me."

"She's got the desk key to my apartment," Shayne pointed out to Pete.

Pete looked at the key on the table beside the chair and the rigid body seated so quietly, as if at some friendly social function.

"I just don't know how, Mr. Shayne. You know no one could get that key from me!" Pete insisted.

"She could have been here for some time. Maybe over an hour, maybe more," Shayne said.

Pete nodded. "An hour? That long? Well, I was off-duty for a while just about an hour ago. Max, the assistant manager, took over. He wouldn't hand out any keys either, not without he had a real good reason, and you said you don't even know this . . . this woman."

"Where is Max now?"

"In the office. I come back maybe twenty minutes ago."

"Call him up here," Shayne said.

Men appeared in the doorway. Mike Shayne whirled. Then the big redhead smiled and nodded a greeting.

"Call who up, Mike?" Lieutenant George Bellow said.

The short, stocky lieutenant of Homicide came slowly into the room. Bellow was a man who rarely smiled and equally rarely scowled.

The lieutenant did everything slowly, quietly, precisely. Bellow tended to be a moody man, given to slow speech and many silences. Now he looked at the body of the woman, and at Shayne.

"The assistant manager, George," Shayne said. "The first mystery we've got is how she got into my place."

"You don't know her?" Bellow asked.

"No, and there's nothing to indicate that she knew me."

"Your clients don't often know you beforehand, Mike," Bellow commented. "Maybe she was a client, or wanted to be."

"Maybe," Shayne conceded, "but I doubt it. My home address isn't common knowledge to strangers; my office is listed in any phone book. She wasn't killed here. And she had the key to my place, the desk key, which means she knew where she was going, or thought she did. She thought she was meeting someone she knew. That's my guess."

"You mean you think she just got the wrong key?" Bellow said.

"That's how I read it," Shayne said.

"How do you know she wasn't killed here?"

"I don't, but I'm guessing. I figure she walked here under her own power, and died of injuries received elsewhere. And George—someone was after her, I think."

Shayne explained about the big, swarthy man who had attacked him. Bellow listened but said nothing. The medical examiner arrived with his black bag and his attendants. The attendants waited in the hall with their basket.

A small, nervous man stood in the doorway.

"You called for me, Mr. Shayne?"

The man was Max Rafferty, assistant manager of the apartment-hotel.

"Max, this woman got the desk key to my place. Do you know how she got it?"

Max Rafferty blinked. "Desk key? No, I don't know anything about it, Mr. Shayne. She never got it from me! I mean—"

The nervous assistant manager stopped, and suddenly turned very red. He looked at Shayne. He took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"I left the desk for a while. Not long, I mean. I had to go fix my adding machine. I mean I had to go and stay in the office while a guy I sent for fixed it. I mean it couldn't have been more than about—"

Shayne touched the small man. "Take it easy, Max. You're not making much sense. Start from the beginning. You took over from Pete?"

Max Rafferty nodded. "Yes, and about ten minutes later the guy came to fix my adding machine. He was real late, a special call. So I went into the office with him. I left

the door open, so I could see the desk.

"Well, you can see the front of the desk from the office, but you can't see the front door or the mail boxes with the desk keys. Maybe she slipped in and took the key. I guess she could have."

Shayne nodded. "Thanks, Max. What are the four boxes closest around mine?"

"The two apartments on either side, and the ones above and below."

"Any of them empty?"

"The one below. You know the ones on both sides, old tenants like you," Max said.

"Fine, Max. You better get back down to the desk. You can go too, Pete," Shayne said. He looked at Bellow to confirm. The lieutenant nodded that it was okay.

Max and Pete left. Bellow's men had been going over the apartment. Now they nodded negatively to Bellow. They had found nothing. The fingerprint man also shook his head.

"A lot of prints in the place, but they all look about the same, probably Mike's Her stuff is loaded too, mostly smudged prints, and a lot that are probably hers," the fingerprint man said.

"Okay," Bellow said. "Pick it all up and we'll work on it down at headquarters."

The medical examiner now stood up and wiped his hands. He looked at the body of the girl. The body still sat there silent and growing rigid.

"Dead less than an hour," the ME said. "She's banged up some, and there's a hell of a lump on the back of her head. I can't be absolutely sure, but from all I can tell she died of a depressed skull fracture."

"Did she get it here?" Shayne asked.

"I doubt it. Very little bleeding. Probably all inside. But my guess is that she got it maybe three hours ago, maybe more, and was walking around with a headache. If she'd gotten a doctor in time she might have been okay. The walking around certainly aggravated the injury."

Bellow looked at the dead woman. "So you think Shayne's right? She got slugged somewhere else and came here and died while waiting?"

"That's the way it looks. I'll tell you more after I get her down to the morgue," the ME said.

Bellow nodded. Attendants took the body away. Bellow looked at Shayne.

"She still could have been trying to get to you, Mike."

"She could have, but I don't like it. She was just sitting and smoking, George. As if she were waiting for a friend. She wasn't scared or alarmed. Her gun was in her purse, the safety on. Someone was after her. Someone had probably beaten her, yet she was acting like she felt safe here. So my guess is that she

thought she was in the apartment of some friend, and was waiting for the friend."

Bellow considered. "That would mean that she didn't know this friend's apartment. I mean, she thought she was in the right place, so she couldn't have known the right place."

"Maybe, George. Still, most of the apartments in this hotel are furnished the same. Of course, I have made a lot of changes, have my own stuff, so you're probably right. Except that it's my guess she wasn't thinking too clearly. That injury probably muddled the hell out of her."

"You could be right. You say her name was Janis Hill?"

"That was the name on the ticket she had. I'm not so sure it's her name. It looked to me like her wallet had been cleaned out. Maybe by herself, or maybe by someone else. The ticket was from New York, which checks with the labels on her clothes. They were New York store labels, and pretty good ones."

"Well, maybe we'll find out more down at headquarters. We'll release her description and name and see if we can get someone to claim the body," Bellow said.

Shayne nodded, said, "How about checking the other apartments? I mean, it's my hunch that she grabbed the key in a hurry and got my key by mistake. Which would probably mean that she wanted one of the four close to mine."

"We'll check it. What about you?"

Shayne shook his head. "I'm tired, George. You can do anything I can, and it's not my case."

"Okay, Mike. Take it easy. I'll let you know what we find, if anything."

Bellow left and Shayne finally poured his four fingers of Martel. The redhead sat in a chair, a different chair, drank his cognac, and looked at the chair where the dead woman had sat.

She had run from something. Had run fast and with a fractured skull, so had run with fear, or perhaps with greed. It was always a mistake to assume that the injured were also the innocent.

She had run *to* something, or someone. Some person she had expected to meet in an apartment in this hotel-apartment house. Someone she would never meet. And was that someone still in the apartment waiting for her?

Janis Hill, from New York and nothing more. A body now on a slab in Miami. Was it a surprise to find herself there on that nameless slab? Or had she always known, in her secret heart, that she would some day end on just such an anonymous slab with a tag on her toe written with a phony name?

But it was not his affair. Janis Hill had not picked his apartment to die in. He was sure of that. There

was no connection between them except the connection between all human beings. He drank to that human connection that binds us all, and that was all he could do for Janis Hill now.

He undressed, turned out his light, and went to bed.

He did not go to sleep.

The telephone rang.

It was Pete on the desk. "Mr. Shayne? The cop just called down from the apartment right above you. He said get up there right away! They got another stiff!!"

III

THE APARTMENT directly above Shayne's apartment was laid out in an identical arrangement, but the furnishings were different. This was a transient apartment, furnished sparsely by the management itself.

"She couldn't have been here," Bellow said. "If this is where she was going."

"No," Shayne said.

The body of the man lay on the floor of the living room. Bellow and his men stood with Shayne looking at the second body, waiting for the medical examiner to make a return trip. This time the ME would not have to tell them too much.

"Shot twice at close range," Bellow said.

Shayne nodded. The man had been shot twice in the chest. Blood had soaked the front of his shirt and spread out in a pool on the floor. Both bullets had passed through the body and struck the wall behind. Shayne looked at the assistant manager, Max Rafferty.

LUCY HAMILTON

"No one reported hearing any shots?" Shayne asked.

"No," Rafferty said.

The assistant manager looked faint. The small man was having a long, hard night. Two deaths in his apartment house were more than he had had in fifteen years of service. Now they came on a single night, and Rafferty did not feel good.

"Silencer," Lieutenant Bellow

said. The short, stocky Homicide man turned to Rafferty. "His name was John Perky?"

Max nodded. "John Perky, that was how he registered. He checked in about a week ago, paid for a month, said he was going to be here at least six months."

"Any visitors?"

"No, not that I saw. Of course, we don't keep that close watch here; no reason to in an apartment-hotel."

The homicide sergeant with Bellow had been searching the body. Now he carefully laid the effects of the dead man out on a table, where Bellow could look at them.

There was some three hundred dollars in bills and change, a wallet, some keys, matches from various local night spots, a pen, and a package of cigarettes. Bellow carefully picked up the wallet and emptied it. Shayne stood next to Bellow to inspect the contents.

There was very little. Another $500 in cash, a ticket for two on a flight to Brazil scheduled for three days time, and the business card of an art dealer in Miami. Nothing else.

Bellow looked at Shayne. "Stripped, just like the woman's wallet."

"And a ticket for two to Brazil," Shayne said.

"Looks like they were running," Bellow said.

Shayne noted the name of the art dealer on the card: Mr. Murry Lester. The address was in the heart of Miami, not too far away.

Another of Bellow's men came out of the bedroom.

"In here, Lieutenant. His bags were never unpacked," the detective said.

The medical examiner appeared in the doorway with his men. The ME did not look happy. He stalked to the body and dropped his bag.

"See if you can find your bodies a little faster or slower next time," the ME said testily. "Maybe I should just hang around until you're sure you've found them all!"

The ME went to work. Bellow and Shayne walked into the bedroom. The fingerprint man was at work, and shook his head when he saw them.

"Mostly smudges and old. Some that look like the victim's. It doesn't look good, Lieutenant."

Bellow just nodded. The lieutenant and Shayne went to where the dead man's bags stood on the floor. One had been opened, and the victim had clearly been living out of the one bag. The second bag was closed. Bellow motioned to one of his men to open the second bag while he examined the first bag.

The first bag contained clothes, a bottle of whisky, some silver glasses, and a thousand dollars in traveler's checks. Most of the clothes had been hastily packed. Some shirts were dirty. Bellow examined the laundry marks.

"Looks like New York, but maybe not. We'll check them," Bellow said. The lieutenant touched the traveler's checks. "A fair sized bundle, but not enough for a run to Brazil. It doesn't look like the killer was after money though."

"No," Shayne said. He was looking at the whisky bottle. It was about half empty, which meant that the dead man was probably not a big drinker if that was all he had consumed in a week in the apartment. Shayne could not remember any special noises from above him in this apartment.

Shayne and Bellow turned to the second bag that had been closed and locked. There were more clothes, also hastily packed, but not used. And there was a large .38 caliber pistol.

Bellow held the pistol in a handkerchief. "He wasn't very careful."

"Or not expecting trouble," Shayne said.

"Yet he was pretty well hiding out, it looks like. That stripped wallet, the woman's stripped wallet. The whole look of it."

"Maybe he was expecting some trouble," Shayne said, "but not such bad trouble."

Bellow continued his search and came up with a slip of paper. The lieutenant looked at it grimly, then handed it silently to Shayne. It had a simple scrawled message. A name and address; *Janis Hill, Flamingo Arms, Apt. 2.*

"That puts them together," Shayne said.

Bellow nodded. "It looks like your analysis was right, Mike. She did get into your apartment thinking it was his. She just grabbed the key from the box below."

"And must have been pretty much out of it, George. She read the number on the tag on her way up. It figures she knew the real number, but forgot it when she read my key."

"Maybe, probably," Bellow said, "but remember that those boxes have names on them in this building. Maybe she didn't know his number, saw his name, grabbed the wrong key, and then read the number."

"Could be," Shayne agreed. "But one thing is sure: she was looking for Perky's apartment and got mine. She hadn't been in Perky's apartment, so never knew her mistake."

Bellow was thoughtful. "Two people, both probably from New York. They come to Miami without identification, and check into separate hotels—not regular hotels either. Out of the way places. They stay away from each other, only the guy has a double ticket for Brazil, and when she's hurt she comes to him. On top of that someone was after the girl, and they've both been killed. What does that sound like?"

"Two people on the run and not wanting to be seen together for a

while. Maybe with some kind of deal in the works. And with some reason to think they are in danger."

"That's how I place it," Bellow said.

"Of course," Shayne said. "We don't know for sure that they were both killed by the same party, or that the Hill girl was even killed. Hers could have been just an accident."

"Not likely," Bellow said. "Maybe the Flamingo Arms will tell us some more."

"Maybe," Shayne said. His grey eyes had been looking at the suitcase they had opened second. A leather tag was inside mixed with the clothes Bellow had removed. The kind of tag a suitcase usually has on the outside.

"What's that tag, George?"

Bellow picked it up. He looked at the tag. Then he looked at Shayne.

"A break, maybe. It's a suitcase name tag, and it's not in the name of any Perky. The name is John MacKay. No address."

"He took it off the bag and left it inside," Shayne said.

"So all we have to do is find a John MacKay, maybe in New York. That's just dandy. Maybe his clothes and stuff will tell us something more."

The medical examiner came to the door of the bedroom.

"Two shots, thirty-eight caliber, close range. Either shot would have done the job. Dead maybe three hours, give or take about an hour. I'll know more later. You think you're going to come up with more, Bellow, or are all the corpses accounted for now?"

"Next one I find I'll send down to your office in a taxi, Doc," Bellow said.

Muttering, the medical examiner walked away and motioned to his assistants to carry the body out. After the ME had gone, Shayne and Bellow completed their examination of the two suitcases. They found nothing else of any clear significance.

Bellow sat in a chair in the neutral transient apartment and frowned "Unless someone comes forward to tell the story, Mike, this could be a hard one. We'll send the info to New York, but we're not even sure they came from New York. I mean, we know the woman flew from New York, but she could have begun somewhere else."

"Maybe the effects will tell you more," Shayne said.

"Maybe," Bellow said moodily. "And maybe her room when we look at it. But I've got a hunch this is going to be one of those bad ones."

"When people are out to hide and cover their own tracks, and then someone kills them, it's pretty hard." Shayne agreed. "We've got two people we don't know, not from Miami, in some kind of danger. We don't know who they really were, what the danger was, who

was after them, or why they were killed. Good luck, George."

"Someone'll come from somewhere sooner or later," Bellow said. "When we know who they really were and where they had run from, we'll crack it."

"Maybe," Shayne said.

Bellow stood up. "Yeh, maybe it's a candidate for the unsolved file, but let's work on it a while."

"You work on it, George. This mess isn't in my lap," Shayne said with a grin.

But he was wrong.

IV

MIKE SHAYNE left Bellow moodily contemplating the cold and transient apartment, and went down to his own apartment. Inside he poured another four fingers of cognac and sat and looked at his room.

A warm room, lived in and familiar. And he thought of the last days of John MacKay, if that had been the dead man's real name. Alone in a cold and neutral room far from home. With a woman he could not, at least for a time, meet. A gun in his suitcase, his identity hidden. Jumping at shadows. Shadows that had finally gotten around to killing him.

Still thinking about the dead man and his lonely death, Shayne went to bed. He was tired, and he went to sleep at once.

He did not sleep long.

He came awake and alert in an instant.

In a single motion he reached for his automatic that hung in its holster beside his bed, and looked at the clock on his bed table. The clock read three o'clock in the dark and quiet morning, and his automatic felt solid in his big hand.

A quiet dark morning.

But not quiet enough.

Shayne had been awakened by the faint sounds at his door.

The redhead lay in the bed for a moment, his automatic ready, and listened to the sounds. They were faint and careful, but they were unmistakeable—the sounds of a picklock at work on his outer door.

Shayne got out of bed and moved across his bedroom as silent as a big cat. He reached the bedroom door, which was open, and stood silent in the doorway.

In the line of light from the corridor beneath his door he saw shadows and movement. He listened to the sounds at his lock. Whoever was picking his lock was an experienced man. Only Shayne's trained and alert ears would have heard the faint noise.

The redhead frowned. The question was how many of them were there? One man, the expert with locks? Or more? Shayne guessed that there would be more. The shadows of feet in the line of light looked like more than one man.

It would be risky to attempt to

capture them if there were too many.

A sudden light and noise in his apartment would probably scare them off safely—but Shayne wanted to know who it was who wanted to enter his apartment so badly.

He had no doubt at all that the intruders at his door were in some way connected to the dead woman and the dead man upstairs.

He wanted to see them—and yet keep them off.

His mind decided, he stepped softly out into the dark living room and positioned himself behind the couch directly facing the door, with the switch of a table lamp near his left hand. The table lamp would not give much light, but the switch for the overhead light was beside the door. If there were more than two of them, to be out in the open would be too risky.

Behind the couch he waited.

The man who worked on the lock was taking great care.

Then the lock clicked and the door opened.

Three men came swiftly into the room, moving with speed and silence. A motion from one of the men sent another of the men toward the bedroom door. The third man, the picklock in his hands, stood back near the door. His job was over.

The first man, in obvious command, stood with his eyes searching the apartment.

Shayne watched. He swore under his breath, He could not see their faces by the light from the hall. In a second the man would reach his bedroom door and discover that he was not in bed. Shayne reached out and turned on the light.

The three men froze like statues.

A long second of absolute silence and paralysis.

Shayne saw the face of the man near the bedroom. The same man who had attacked him earlier!

He saw the face of the picklock expert. A thin, pale face he did not recognize and yet knew. A professional small-time lock man, one of a thousand petty criminals up for hire by anyone who could pay them.

He did not see the face of the leader.

When the light of the single lamp went on the man who was the leader had his back turned to Shayne.

Shayne swore again.

The frozen instant broke.

"Hold it right there! All of you!" Shayne commanded from behind the couch, his automatic levelled.

The man who had attacked him earlier dove for the cover of a chair. The thin-faced professional slid out the door into the safety of the corridor.

The leader whirled, a pistol in his hand, and fired in the same motion. Shayne ducked. The bullet struck the couch. Shayne came up with his automatic. The leader of the three

men lunged for the door and Shayne fired once.

The leader grunted and was knocked sideways against the door jamb. The force of the .45 slug hurled the man against the door. Clutching his shoulder, the leader bounced off the door and out into the corridor.

Shayne raised up.

The man behind the chair fired.

Shayne ducked again.

He came back up just as the man who had attacked him earlier dashed across the room and out the door. Shayne fired twice and missed both shots.

The doorway stood open and empty. Feet pounded away down the hall. Shayne was up and across the room to the door. In the hall doors opened and faces peered out. People came out into the hallway and Shayne had no more chance to fire at the three men who had reached the doorway to the stairs.

The detective whirled and ran back to his telephone. He called Pete on the desk. Pete had heard the shots.

"Are you all right, Mr. Shayne?" he asked.

"Yeah, fine. Call the police quick. Is there any policeman in sight?"

"No. But—"

"Watch out for three men, one wounded!"

There was a silence. "I don't see them, Mr. Shayne! Wait, here's a squad car!"

"Tell them to cover the garage!" Shayne barked into the telephone.

He could hear Pete shouting to the police. There was a long silence with loud noises in the lobby of his building. Shayne waited. People stood in his doorway and stared in. Most were only curious. They were old residents and they knew who Shayne was and what he did.

Some of the people in the door, in their pajamas and robes and night gowns, looked with a kind of horror and hypnotized stare at the small trail of blood on the floor.

"Mr. Shayne?" It was Pete's voice.

"Yes?" the redhead snapped.

"They went out through the garage. They had a car. The police missed them. They police said there was some blood."

"I got one of them," Shayne said. "Okay, Pete. Call Lieutenant Bellow and report that three men tried to jump me. When you get him put him on my line."

Shayne hung up. By then three uniformed policemen had arrived. Two of them dispersed the crowd of night-clothed gawkers, and the third talked to Shayne. The policeman knew Shayne and took down the report.

Soon after that Bellow was on the line. Shayne explained what had happened, and that he thought the three men were involved with the two bodies of the night. He admitted he had seen only two of them, and gave the description of the thin lock expert.

The uniformed policeman talked to Bellow, and then the three policemen left. Shayne closed his door and all was still again. He surveyed the room. He would need some repairs to the couch. Two bullets had struck his cover leaving nasty holes in the heavy upholstery and stuffing. Better than nasty holes in Shayne.

Wide awake, the red-head went into his kitchen to make a pan of scrambled eggs. He prepared coffee in his dripolator. He made toast. Then he sat down at the kitchen table to eat. He looked out his window at the dark night city of Miami.

And knew that this was his mess after all.

His mess because they had been looking for something, and they thought the girl had left it in his room with him!

They would not believe otherwise, not without talking to him, and he had a good idea of just how they would talk.

No, he was in it whether he wanted to be or not, and the sooner he found out who they were and what they wanted the better it would be for him. This was not a case for someone else now—it was a case for Shayne himself!

And then knew, suddenly, that the dead woman *had* left something in his apartment!

Because the big, swarthy man had followed her, and knew she had had whatever it was when she came into Shayne's apartment. And they probably knew, somehow, that whatever it was that they wanted had not left the apartment with the body. He did not know how they knew that, but it was almost certain that they did.

They would not have risked breaking into his apartment with him in it if they had not been certain that what they wanted was almost sure to be in the apartment.

Probably one of them had gone to identify the body and had somehow managed to see the dead Janis Hill's effects. He would not be sure until he checked again with Bellow, but somehow they had known, or guessed, that whatever they wanted was in Shayne's apartment.

It did not matter, really, whether the Hill woman had left something in his apartment or not. The three men who wanted whatever it was thought she had, and as far as

the danger to Shayne was concerned that was the same thing.

It would be better for him if she *had* left something, because the three attackers would never believe that she had not, and the quickest way to stop them was to find whatever it was they were looking for!

His snack finished, Shayne went out into his living room and let his grey eyes study the entire room.

The woman had had plenty of time to hide something almost anywhere. But she had been injured, probably feeling weak, and certainly not thinking too well. At the same time, she thought she was in a friendly apartment, so why hide whatever it was at all?

There was only one logical answer. Of course—to hide it from anyone who might have followed her, and who might reach her before her friend returned!

The redhead considered, let his glance slowly traverse the walls of his room.

Janis Hill had been feeling weak, probably sick with a headache. She had sat in the high-backed leather chair to wait for MacKay. She had been smoking. Her pistol had been in her bag with the safety on.

So, although having just been beaten, knowing she was pursued, she had not had her pistol ready. Shayne could imagine the confusion of her dying mind. Unable to think clearly enough to have her pistol out, yet worried enough to hide something.

Weak and dying.

She would not have hidden whatever it was too well. He was sure of that. Yet nothing so far came to his eye.

The redhead tugged slowly on his left earlobe as he studied his living room. He thought of the classic tale—that which is best hidden is often in plain sight. So obvious that it is not seen.

Shayne began to circle the room.

So obvious no one saw it.

That was what he was looking for. Something that did not belong. Something a trifle out of place. Something no one would notice who did not know the apartment intimately. But he could see nothing.

He began to search all the furniture. Maybe he was wrong and she had not hidden whatever it was but just lost it by accident. He searched under all the seat cushions, and down inside the upholstery of all his chairs and the couch.

He searched the floor and under the rugs.

He looked beneath all the tables, the chairs, and the desk to see if she had somehow fastened something beneath a piece of furniture.

He straightened up.

Nothing.

And then he looked at the large mirror over his living room mantel. He stared at the mirror. Then he began to laugh in silence.

Stuck in the lower left hand corner of the mirror was a small yellow piece of cardboard. It looked like the kind of thing—a ticket, a cleaning tag, a memo slip—almost every bachelor sticks on his mirror to remind himself of something he has to do.

So common no one would really ever notice.

But Shayne knew that he had not placed anything there in the corner of the mirror.

He strode to the mirror and picked up the piece of cardboard. It was a pawn ticket!

A ticket for something pawned in Miami less than two days ago! The address was on the ticket, of course.

And the ticket did not belong to Shayne.

There was no doubt that this was what the three men had been after —or, at least, they had been after what had been pawned. Shayne doubted that they knew that what they wanted had indeed been pawned, which was another reason they would not have noticed the ticket.

Shayne held the ticket and considered his next action. He was a part of the mess now, whether he wanted to be or not. The three attackers, and whoever had sent them if they had not come on their own, would be after him. He could turn the pawn ticket over to Bellow and the police, but that would not get him off the hook, and Shayne liked to handle his own affairs when it was his skin on the line.

He had the pawn ticket, and the address of the dead woman's room in Miami. Maybe the room would tell him something about who had been after the dead woman.

The people who were now after him.

V

MIKE SHAYNE finally got a few hours sleep that night, with no more bodies, attacks or alarms, and by nine-thirty the next morning he was in his office to clear up the details of his latest case. While he worked, Lucy Hamilton located both the pawn shop and the Flamingo Arms for him.

"The pawn shop is about ten blocks from here, Michael," the pert, brown-eyed girl said, "and the Flamingo Arms is a motel about two miles from here on the north edge of the city."

"That far? She picked an out of the way place all right," Shayne said. "All right, Angel. Now I want you to handle something. It's possible that the men who were after Miss Hill might know about the pawn shop. If they do they could be watching and they'd know me. So I want you to take the ticket and pick up whatever it was she pawned. The pawn shop owner might remember it was a woman who pawned it anyway and not want to give it to me."

"All right, Michael," Lucy said.

"Be careful," Shayne said, "and bring it straight back here."

Lucy left and Shayne finished his paper work. Then he lit a cigarette and sat back in his chair behind his desk and looked out at the sunny city through the window.

He thought about one aspect of the affair that puzzled him. At least three violent men were looking hard for something Janis Hill and John MacKay had had, or so it seemed. Both MacKay and the Hill woman had died violently. Both had been hiding.

And yet neither the Hill girl nor MacKay had acted as if they thought they were that much in danger!

Shayne puzzled it out. The two victims had been hiding, but they had not been hiding that hard. They had not acted as if they feared they would be killed. Both had had guns, neither had been ready to use them.

Both victims had seemed to expect some trouble, but not trouble of the size they got. Why?

It looked as though there had been something important that the two victims had not known!

It was a puzzler. Mike Shayne decided to call Bellow.

The lieutenant had little to tell. Yes, two different men had come to look at bodies, and both had looked at the Hill woman and her possessions. Both finally said she was not their missing wife.

"We went out to The Flamingo Arms. Nothing."

Shayne hung up, and Lucy returned soon after. She said nothing, but opened her bag and placed an object on the desk.

A small statue about sixteen inches high and Oriental. It was heavy. Shayne studied it. The figure of a man, Chinese and bearded, a dark green color. The detail was intricate.

Shayne looked at Lucy. "Jade?"

"I think so, Michael. It's my hobby, you know. It looks like a very good statue, Ming or T'ang."

"Valuable?"

"If it's what it looks like, it should be worth a small fortune," Lucy said.

"How small?"

"I don't know for sure, Michael, it would depend on just how rare it was, its history, all that. Perhaps fifty thousand dollars."

Shayne whistled. "Tidy, especially if you're on the run for some reason."

"Unless that was why they were running," Lucy pointed out.

"True, Angel, very true. Still, it might even be a good reason to run. Okay. Now you lock this up in the safe, and when I'm gone keep the door locked to anyone you don't know. Did it all go smoothly at the pawn shop?"

"Not a hitch, Michael," Lucy said. "I saw no one watching, and the pawn shop owner didn't bat an eye. Just went and got it for the one

hundred fifty dollars he had loaned on it."

"Just one hundred fifty dollars?"

"That's all," Lucy said, and she frowned. "Considering that you're not being paid for this, I'd say one hundred fifty dollars was enough."

"I get the message, Angel," Shayne grinned. "Maybe I can find a client somewhere along the way."

"Try to find a live one, Michael," Lucy said drily.

Shayne chuckled as the pert girl went to lock the statue in the safe. Then the redhead clapped his panama on his shock of unruly hair and left the office. In the street he got into his car and started for the Flamingo Arms Motel.

The Flamingo Arms turned out to be a fairly good family style motel on a less-traveled road. It was not the kind of place where a fleeing woman would be expected to go —which was certainly why Janis Hill had picked it.

Shayne parked and went into the office. A tall, youngish woman with the face of a Greek goddess smiled a smile that would have launched a lot more than a thousand ships if she were at the other side of the ocean.

"Yes, sir?" this apparition purred. "Can I be of service?"

Shayne smiled as manly a smile as he could muster.

"I'm looking for a friend, a Miss Hill."

"Ah, Number Seven, of course," the modern Diana said, and then looked at Shayne curiously. "I wondered when she would be found. Are you her husband?"

Shayne was taken aback both by the statement and the suggestion. "What made you think she was lost?"

"Oh, I can always tell. Pretty, young, obviously from out of town, probably New York, and all alone here for days. They are usually running from a man, usually a husband."

"Bully detecting," Shayne said.

The girl frowned again. "This one was different, though. I mean, they usually have a boy friend. Or are you the boy friend and not the husband?"

"I'm the bloodhound," Shayne said. He flashed his credentials just fast enough for her to see them but not quite be sure what they were.

"The police?" the Florida Aphrodite said. "Has she done something?"

"She got herself in trouble all right," Shayne said.

"And you want to question her?"

Shayne was surprised again. "Is she in her room?"

"I've never seen her go out," the beautious desk clerk said.

"How about other visitors?"

"None, as far as I know. I'm not on duty all the time. Who hired you? Her husband?"

Shayne blinked. "Hired?"

"You're a private cop. I read fast," the goddess said, and grinned. "Besides, you flashed too fast for a

cop. I've seen that one tried before. It's okay. I like private detectives. They're exciting. Anyway, the real cops were here already."

Shayne was within an inch of forgetting the whole case as she flashed him the smile again and arched her back ever so slightly. A slight arch, but as effective as a broadside. Shayne sighed. He made a big mental note to return, soon, to the Flamingo Arms.

"I'm glad," he said. "Let's talk about it some more, but right now I'd like to see her room."

The gorgeous creature watched him. "You act like you're sure she's out. You're not telling something."

"I'm sure she's out," Shayne said. "And that's all I can tell, okay?"

"Well—All right, come on."

Shayne followed the long beauty out into the sun and right along the neat and clean row of doors. Number seven proved to be the last one in the first row on the ground floor. The exact room to pick for anonymity and relatively fast escape.

The beautiful desk girl opened the door with her key after repeated knocks had raised no answer. Shayne stepped inside, and the angelic Amazon stood with her back to the door and watched him go to work.

Bellow had said that he had found absolutely nothing except her clothes. The clothes had told nothing yet, and were down at Headquarters. Bellow had said that the clothes were all he found and took.

Shayne considered the room. It was small, but pleasant. There was a bathroom and a tiny kitchen. In the bathroom Shayne saw that the window looked out on the parking area. The guests of the motel parked their cars behind their respective units.

Shayne bent down and looked closely at the window. There were marks on the sill. Deep scratches in the paint. The redhead called to the Amazon.

"What would you say about those marks?" Shayne asked.

The girl looked. "Heels. High heels. I'd say a woman climbed out that window." And she looked out again. "But her car is still here."

"That's her car?"

"Yes it is."

"Did the police know that?"

"Of course. But it's just a hired

car. They looked it over, and I guess they're coming to tow it away soon."

Shayne nodded. It looked like Janis Hill had made a fast exit out the bathroom window, but had not used her car. Probably thought it safer to make no noise and beat it on foot. But from whom? Shayne answered his own question—the same men Shayne had seen. Probably her eventual killers.

Shayne went back out into the main room of the motel unit. Everything was neat and in order. There was no sign of the kind of violence that would end in a fractured skull. Whatever had happened to Janis Hill had not happened here.

Shayne began a thorough search of the room. It did not take long. The room was not heavily furnished. As he had expected, he found nothing.

He was just about to give up when he had a sudden hunch. He turned in the room and looked at the long mirror over the bureau.

A small piece of paper was stuck in the corner of the mirror!

Shayne grinned. Bellow, too, had missed it. So simple and so obvious! Apparently, Janis Hill had a habit of sticking memos, notes, address, cards in the corners of mirrors. It made Shayne think—people in show business had that habit. Every dressing room mirror he had ever seen had been filled with such pieces of paper.

Shayne strode to the mirror and took off the piece of paper. It was an address and a date and a time! Shayne slipped it into his pocket. Then he went out and made a quick search of the hired car, but Bellow had gone over it pretty well. He found nothing.

"I guess that's it," Shayne said to the gorgeous Amazon, "And thanks for the help."

"My pleasure. You'll be back this way? I'm sure it's a complicated matter. You will have to ask me questions?"

Shayne grinned. "You know, I just might have to. What's your name, by the way?"

"Diana," the goddess said.

"Mike," Shayne said.

"Hurry back, Mike," the goddess said.

Shayne wished all the way to his car that he did not have to go at all. But there were three men who thought he had a certain statue, or knew where it was, and Shayne did not like being a target.

And in his car he looked at the slip of paper. The date was today, the time an hour from now, and the address was one he had seen before: the address of Mr. Murry Lester, Art Dealer!

VI

THE OFFICE of Art Dealer Murry Lester turned out to be a ground floor store front in a good section of Miami. An elegant and sophisti-

cated looking establishment. Shayne parked across the street. He got out and started across toward the shop.

As he reached the shop he saw something at once—one whole section of the window was devoted to Oriental objects! Murry Lester seemed to be an expert in Oriental art!

Shayne started for the door and Lieutenant George Bellow stepped out.

"Hello, Mike. You looking for Mr. Murry Lester?"

"That was the idea, George," Shayne said.

"I thought you were out of this affair," Bellow said.

"I don't like men breaking into my apartment," Shayne said, "so I thought I'd see what I could do to stop them."

"Any idea what they were after?"

"No, not yet," Shayne lied. He did not want to turn over the statue just yet. He had a hunch that the statue was at the center of the whole affair. On top of that, he had a hunch that there might be a fee involved in the return of the statue. He disliked working for nothing, somehow.

"Did Lester have any ideas?" Shayne said.

Bellow shook his head. "Claims he never heard of any Janis Hill, John MacKay or John Perky. Never saw any of them. Says he gives out his cards pretty easily. Anyone might have one. He can account for all his time last night."

"That about covers all bases," Shayne said. With the one exception of what Shayne knew, and no one else alive did—that Janis Hill had had an appointment with Lester this morning, or at least had been going to see Lester. It was possible that Lester did not know about the appointment.

Bellow looked at Shayne. "You coming? We've got the descriptions on the wires, special care on New York, and that's about all we can do now."

"I think you've covered it all," Shayne agreed. "No sense my talking to him. You told him about the killings?"

Bellow said, "He still says he doesn't know them. Even showed him pics. No go."

"That does it then," Shayne said.

Shayne walked back to his car, got in, and followed Bellow's squad car away. He followed for three blocks, waved to Bellow, and turned off. Once out of sight, Shayne gunned his engine and circled back to the Lester shop.

He parked up the block again and stepped out. Shayne was not satisfied. Janis Hill had been going to see Murry Lester. Janis Hill was dead. John MacKay had had Lester's card. John MacKay was dead.

Janis Hill, and probably MacKay, had had a rare Oriental statue worth a great deal of money. Murry Lester dealt in Oriental art. People

were looking for the statue or some lead to it.

It was all a hell of a lot of coincidence.

And maybe it was just coincidence. After all, a dealer in Oriental art might be approached by someone with an Oriental statue but know nothing else about the affair. Still, Shayne had a feeling.

So the redhead walked to Lester's store and went in. There were two customers in the shop. Clients would have been a better term, Shayne guessed, since it was obvious that this was an elegant establishment where no direct selling was done. Instead, the customers sat and browsed through catalogs while the well-dressed sales women smoked and advised.

Shayne wanted a look at Murry Lester. A door marked *Private* showed him where Lester probably was. He did not want to show himself too clearly to Lester yet. He decided that his best course of action was to sit in the shop as unobtrusively as possible and wait.

A middle-aged woman with blue-grey hair approached him.

"May I help you, sir?"

Shayne played like a collector. "That we'll see, eh? I'm particularly interested in the T'ang period."

The woman smiled. "So many are, Mr.—?"

"O'Brien," Shayne said. "Perhaps you have a catalogue?"

"Of course," the woman said.

The woman went and came back with a thin catalogue. Shayne took it, smiled, and sat to read it. The woman bowed politely and left him discreetly alone. Shayne pretended to read the catalogue very carefully.

He was almost finished, had been in the shop too long already, when he got his break. A man came in and began to argue with one of the sales ladies. Shayne heard him demand to see Lester.

The man who came out of the private office was small and dapper, a slender man with a pale face even in Miami. Shayne watched him handle the irate man smoothly. But what Shayne watched most were his eyes and hands.

It was quite obvious Murry Lester was nervous.

The small art dealer had something on his mind. The man's eyes continually glanced away and around the shop, and yet did not see anything. His hands moved in small spasms, as if not under the control of his mind.

Lester barely saw the man he was talking to, and saw no one and nothing else. From time to time Lester looked at his watch.

Shayne's grey eyes observed the dapper little man. Then Shayne watched as Lester invited the angry man into the private office. The instant the two men disappeared, Shayne stood up quietly, left the catalogue, and walked out unobserved. He walked to his car, got in, and waited.

He lit a cigarette and watched the door of the elegant shop.

Murry Lester was very nervous about something.

The first to come out was the irate man who had demanded to see Lester.

Shayne lit a second cigarette. He had taken no more than three puffs when Murry Lester came out of the shop.

The small art dealer looked neither right nor left, but turned and walked fast along the sidewalk to a car parked up the block. Shayne started his engine. Lester got into the car. When the art dealer pulled away into the traffic, Shayne eased out and took position close behind him.

The redhead followed as close as possible without being spotted. He had another puzzle on his mind. Lester was nervous and in a hurry, yet the art dealer was not being *that* careful. It was the same pattern again—a clear problem but not of the magnitude of murder.

In other words, Lester had a problem, but did not seem to be worried about being followed. Once more it looked to Shayne as if Lester, like the two victims, knew there was trouble, but was not aware of how much trouble.

Shayne continued to think about this as he followed the car of the art dealer. Lester made no attempt to evade any pursuit, gave no indication that he was aware of being followed. The art dealer drove straight and steady, clearly intent only on his destination.

The destination, Shayne began to realize after a time, was beginning to look like the airport!

A few minutes later there was no doubt. Lester's car entered the airport and Shayne followed.

The redhead was thinking hard. Lester had no baggage, unless it had been in the car, so it was probable that the art dealer was coming to the airport to meet someone.

The question was—who?

Shayne moved up a little closer, now that they were in the airport. There were so many cars now that the chance of him being spotted was slimmer.

By the time Lester pulled up and turned into the parking lot, Shayne was right behind him. The redhead parked a few places down and watched Lester jump out of his car and walk quickly toward the terminal of National Airlines. Shayne got out and followed.

Inside the terminal he watched as Lester went up to the desk.

And knew at once that he had guessed wrong!

Murry Lester had a ticket!

The art dealer was not meeting anyone. He was taking a plane out. Shayne had a quick decision to make.

There would not be time to alert Bellow. He was not at all sure that Bellow would think that a trip by Lester was important enough to alert the New York police. Shayne

was not sure that it was important enough himself.

But he had a feeling—call it a shot in the dark!

Bellow did not know about the Oriental statue. As far as the police were concerned, Lester had a full alibi to the murders and was not involved. But they did not know about the statue.

Shayne made his decision.

He stepped to the desk the instant Lester left and flashed his credentials. He spoke in his best official bark.

"I want a ticket on the same flight with that small man you just validated," Shayne barked. "Murry Lester."

"Mr. Lester's flight?" the girl said. "Police?"

"Yes, and quick. How much time is there?"

"Ten minutes, sir. Flight twelve, non-stop to New York. I'm not sure we have—wait, yes, here's a cancellation. I think—"

"Bill it on this credit card," Shayne snapped and dropped his card on the desk. "I'll be back in three minutes."

Shayne strode to the nearest telephone booth. He called Lucy Hamilton. He told her to call his friend, private detective Ed Green, in New York, and have Green rent a car and meet him at the National Building at Kennedy International. He told Lucy to tell everyone he was simply out of town.

As he returned to the desk, Flight twelve was being called for the last time. He got his ticket and dashed for the loading area. He made it just as the gates were closing. He had more luck than he had expected. His seat was on the opposite side of the aisle from Lester, and behind the art dealer.

The jet took off into the bright Miami sun and quickly climbed to cruising altitude. Shayne settled back, but with his eyes fixed straight ahead as he feigned sleep. He did not take his eyes off Murry Lester the entire flight from Miami northward.

All the way to New York Shayne observed the art dealer—and saw nothing.

Lester did not eat, had only one cocktail, and spent most of his time looking out the window. Once, over Washington, the art dealer went back to the rest rooms. He passed Shayne but did not even glance at the detective.

The next thing Shayne knew they were circling in the pattern for Kennedy Airport.

The signal came to fasten seat belts. The jet came down fast and moments later taxied up to the National Airlines Building. Shayne went off before Lester, just in case the art dealer might have been suspicious.

As Shayne emerged from the covered gangway into the loading area he did not look at any of the waiting people, but strode straight on out of the loading section and

down the corridor to a place all those on the plane would have to pass.

He stepped into a semi-hidden spot near the newspaper stand and waited.

He did not have to wait long.

Moments later Murry Lester came hurrying past. The art dealer was no longer alone.

A man in the uniform of a chauffeur walked with Lester. The man walked arrogantly, leading the art dealer. Shayne studied the man as he passed. He had a hard face with the battered features of a former boxer. There was a definite bulge under the left shoulder of his uniform jacket.

Shayne stepped out to follow. He would be more cautious this time—the chauffeur looked like a man who would be careful about being followed. But Shayne knew his trade. He followed without being seen.

The chauffeur and Lester walked straight out the front entrance. They went directly to the parking lot. Shayne followed them and looked for his friend, Ed Green. He was not concerned, Green would find him. He kept his eyes on the chauffeur and Lester.

The two men stopped at a large, black Rolls-Royce limousine.

The chauffeur, as Shayne had expected, was a careful man. He stopped and looked behind him and all around. He stood there for some seconds, while Shayne

crouched hidden only a few cars away.

"Mike?" a voice whispered.

Ed Green crouched beside him.

"Hello, Ed," Shayne whispered, his eyes on the chauffeur.

"That the quarry?" Green said.

"Yeah. Where's the car?"

"Two aisles over near the exit. I figured you'd be in a hurry. New York license SG 111-505."

"Good. Any other exit?"

"No, not from this spot. You go get the car. I'll stall them long enough."

Green stepped out and began to walk toward where the chauffeur had just completed his survey. The chauffeur froze and watched Green come. Green was playing drunk, and Shayne grinned as he saw his detective friend stop and ask for a match. It would take Green just

long enough to get his cigarette lighted.

Shayne moved off under cover and reached the hired car. He got in and started the engine. He lit a cigarette. The limousine came into view heading for the exit. Shayne pulled out in front—he knew there was only one road as far as the exit from the airport.

He led the way with his eye glued to the rear view mirror. As they neared the exit he rested his hand on the turn indicator. Jets roared off and screamed over out toward Jamaica Bay. Then he saw the turn indicator go on the limousine—right!

Shayne flipped his indicator instantly to the right and made the turn ahead of the Rolls-Royce.

On the highway he settled down to drive with his eye on the rear-view for any change in the direction of the Rolls-Royce. Imperceptibly he slowed down. The Rolls-Royce came on fast and passed him. The chauffeur did not even glance at him.

Shayne grinned and followed the limousine.

They were heading away from New York out toward Nassau and Suffolk County on Long Island.

VII

IN THE DARK night Mike Shayne moved closer to the big house. It was a mansion on the North Shore of Long Island, just beyond Oyster Bay. There was no wall or fence, and Shayne moved now through the trees and neared the house itself. The black Rolls-Royce was parked in front of the house.

The chase had been smooth and uneventful. As far as Shayne could tell he had not been observed. His car was parked out of sight back on the highway just before the turnoff into the private road of the mansion. Less than ten minutes had passed since the limousine had turned into the mansion.

Shayne moved with caution. He was sure that the chauffeur had been armed, which meant that the grounds might be well guarded also. But he reached the house without incident.

In the night he circled the house until he saw a light in three downstairs windows. He reached the windows and crouched. He peered in.

The room was a kind of library, and there were four people in the room. One was Lester and another the chauffeur, who stood back and away from the others.

The third was a small, severe-looking woman in a mannish suit, with her dark hair pulled back in a librarian type bun. Her eyes were cool and steady.

The fourth person was a short man of about sixty-five. A grey-haired man with a thick grey mustache and a strong and saturnine face. He wore an expensive looking business suit. This man seemed to do most of the talking.

Shayne could hear nothing, but he watched the small man shouting and waving his arms at Murry Lester. The art dealer was pale and took all the shouting without reply. The chauffeur stood with folded arms, and the severe-looking woman listened but spoke only now and then.

Whatever was going on, it was obvious that the short man was the boss, and it was equally obvious that he was angry about something. And Shayne could hear nothing with the window closed. He studied the window with an idea of opening it, but it was obviously locked.

Shayne considered. There was no course but to walk in and talk to them. He had a hunch about the statue; maybe he could brace them.

Shayne left the window and moved cautiously around the house to the front entrance. Then he stepped up to the front door and rang the bell. After a few moments the door opened. A tall man in the dress of a butler stood there.

"Yes sir?"

"I'm looking for Mr. Murry Lester," Shayne said.

"Mr. Lester? Yes sir. I believe he is in a conference with Mr. Kiakin at the moment, but if you would care to wait in the den?"

"Of course," Shayne said.

The butler led the detective to a small room just off the large entrance hall. Shayne stepped inside and the butler closed the door. The redhead lighted a cigarette. He had barely had time to see that the room was furnished with taste and a lot of money, when the door opened again. The small, severe-looking woman in the mannish suit came in.

"You wanted to see Mr. Lester, Mr.—"

"O'Brien," Shayne said. "As a matter of fact, I want to see Mr. Lester and Mr. Kiakin."

Shayne smiled his most disarming smile to convince the woman that he was an old and trusted friend of Lester and Kiakin. It was clear that the small man with the mustache and the air of authority was Kiakin.

"O'Brien?" the woman said. "I don't believe I know the name. Have you known Mr. Kiakin long? Just what do you want to see him about?"

"A private matter," Shayne said, ignoring the first question. "Miss—Or is it Mrs.?"

"Miss," the severe woman said shortly. "I'm Miss Minton, and if you know Mr. Kiakin you should know that. I happen to be Mr. Kiakin's executive secretary! Now, how do you know Mr. Kiakin, and what do you want?"

Shayne grinned. "All right, I don't know Kiakin, but I know Lester, and I think it'd be smart for them to both talk to me!"

"Is that a threat, Mr. O'Brien?"

"No, just a suggestion, Miss Minton."

The woman looked at him hard.

Her severe face was set in an expression of distaste. But she nodded.

"Very well, Mr. O'Brien, I'll tell Mr. Kiakin what you say, but I doubt that he will talk to you without knowing more about your business."

"Tell him it's about John MacKay," Shayne said bluntly.

Shayne felt that the severe woman blinked. But if she did she covered it at once. She nodded again. Then she turned and left.

Shayne went back to his cigarette and his study of the room. It was a nice room. The room was on the other side of the house from the entrance, and he stood at the window and looked out at the wide view of Long Island Sound. It was a magnificent view.

Shayne never heard the attacker behind him until something hard struck his head.

He knew only that the attacker had not come through the door. There must be a secret entrance to the room. That was his last thought before he felt himself falling, felt himself hit, felt another blow on his head, and it all went red and black.

Shayne came awake. His head hurt, and he was lying on some flat surface. A soft surface, yet hard, like a very thin mattress.

He blinked. Wherever he was lying was semi-dark. There seemed to be light from somewhere to his left. He turned his head painfully

A rectangle of light.

A rectangle of bars, vertical bars.

And beyond the bars a kind of hallway where the light was, and another barred door across the lighted hallway.

Shayne sat up. He was in a cell!

His head spun and he held onto what he had been lying on—a cell bunk. His head cleared and he looked all around. He was alone. In a jail cell.

He felt for his cigarettes. They were gone. They were gone along with his wallet, automatic, change and keys.

The cell, and the corridor outside the barred door, were silent. He could not hear even breathing. He sat back against the stone wall. The last he remembered was waiting in the den of the mansion of Mr. Kiakin.

He had been waiting, and then someone had come up behind him and hit him. Someone who had come into the den through some secret entrance. Why?

He had mentioned the name of John MacKay.

The Miami detective heard the clang of distant metal. A metal door had opened far off. Footsteps came along the corridor outside his cell. A big, burly man appeared in his barred doorway.

"So you're awake, Shayne?" he said.

"I'm awake. Where the hell am I?" Shayne snapped.

"You got it wrong, friend. Around here we ask and you talk,

right? Now you just get that right and we'll all have a fine time."

"State cops?" Shayne asked.

"Town police, Shayne, and this ain't your town. You try and remember that, right?"

"What's the charge, or do you have one?"

"Trespassing, friend. Four witnesses. We don't like a man to trespass and bother our residents here. And don't wave your license at us; it's from a long way off."

"I get knocked out inside a house and that's trespassing?"

"You were found outside the house, under a window. We found your footprints under other windows. Now, people got a right to hit a trespasser, especially one with a gun."

"I'm on a case," Shayne said.

"Then you should of checked with us. You want to come talk to the lieutenant?"

Shayne nodded. Obviously whoever had hit him had also cooked up a story. In small communities like this, a man as rich as Kiakin would get police protection.

"Let's go, then," the burly man said.

Shayne stood and when the cell door was opened he walked out and into the corridor. He preceded the burly policeman along the corridor. They passed through a barred door and out into a plain corridor. The burly man guided him into an office. In the office, a tall, thin man looked up. The man wore a blue

police uniform, and the rank of lieutenant.

"Sit down, Shayne," the lieutenant said. "I'm Lieutenant Forbes. You want to tell me your story?"

"Will it do any good?"

"Don't get wise with me!" Forbes said. "We answered a call. An unidentified man was trespassing. Knocked out and it turned out he was armed. We've got citizens to protect."

"Especially rich ones," Shayne said.

"The rich have more to fear from crackpots," the lieutenant said evenly. "We patrol more for the rich. We've got a nice, quiet community here, and we don't like outsiders causing trouble. Now, if you've got a story, let's hear it."

Shayne considered. Someone at the Kiakin house had not wanted him around. Still, maybe, just maybe, when the Minton woman told her boss and Lester that an

O'Brien was waiting for them, neither of them knew his name and got scared.

And how close were the police to Kiakin? Maybe it was Kiakin himself who had something to hide. Shayne decided to play it as close as he could. There was no point telling Forbes that he had been hit inside the house. Not with everyone else saying something else. It was clear who Forbes would believe.

"I'm on a case," Shayne said. "I came up trying to get some information on John MacKay and Janis Hill. I was going to talk to Kiakin, but decided to look around first. Then I got hit. That's all. I still want to talk to Kiakin."

"You should have come to us. Mr. Kiakin isn't so hard to talk to, but he likes to know who's coming," Forbes said. The lieutenant looked at him. "What about John MacKay?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out," Shayne said carefully. "I need information on him. What can you tell me?"

"Not much. He worked for Mr. Kiakin—some sort of librarian, a cataloguer or something. Sort of a personal assistant," Lieutenant Forbes said.

"Worked?" Shayne said quickly. "He doesn't work for Kiakin any more?"

"Quit about a week or so ago," Forbes said. "Why? Is he in some trouble down in Miami?"

"He's dead down in Miami," Shayne said. "Shot, murdered."

Lieutenant Forbes sat forward. The tall policeman reached for a cigarette and lit it. "A killing? And you came up here?" Forbes said.

"He worked for Kiakin," Shayne said, implying that he had known this all along. Sometimes a man was just lucky. Now it looked like he had gone to Kiakin's mansion for a good reason, and he did not have to talk about the statue.

"You should have told us," Forbes said. "Murder is another matter. Any real leads?"

"No," Shayne admitted.

"Nothing direct on Kiakin?"

"Not that I know. You can check in Miami with Lieutenant Bellow. Maybe he came up with something since I left."

"I will. Dead, huh?" Forbes smoked and thought.

"What about Janis Hill?" Shayne said.

Forbes shook his head absently. "Never heard that name."

But Forbes was thinking of something else. "MacKay was a kind of odd-ball. If you don't have anything, I suggest you take a look at his wife."

"His wife?" Shayne said quietly, neutral-voiced.

"Yeh. She lives around here. Get the address from my sergeant," Forbes said. He looked at Shayne. "We like to cooperate, Shayne, no matter what you probably think. You have to understand our prob-

lems. Talk to the wife, snoop around, but be careful. It's my guess you'll find what you want without bothering Mr. Kiakin."

"Meaning I better find what I want without bothering Mr. Kiakin?" Shayne said bluntly.

"Meaning," Lieutenant Forbes said, carefully stubbing out his cigarette, "that you better have a damn good case, a very damn good case before I see you set one toe on Mr. Kiakin's place again."

"In other words, if I come up with an airtight murder case against Kiakin or one of his people, you'll make an arrest. But you won't lift a finger to try to find the truth?"

"I am not going to be wrong, Shayne," Forbes said. "That's the way it is. You remember. Airtight, or it's you I run in."

Forbes looked straight at Shayne, unflinching. Shayne got it. Forbes would not work on any case that might go bad for Kiakin unless someone handed him the case all wrapped up. At least, the lieutenant was honest.

"I'll remember," Shayne said.

"Good. Pick up your stuff at the desk, and get MacKay's address. And good luck. We'll be watching you."

Shayne walked out and down the corridor toward the desk. He was sure that Forbes and his men would be watching. They would explain to Mr. Kiakin that Shayne had a right to snoop a little, but they had their eye on the interloper!

The burly sergeant handed over Shayne's possessions and the address. Then he leaned on the desk and picked his teeth and watched Shayne as the redhead walked out into the night.

Shayne found his car parked in front of the local station, and climbed in. He drove off to have a talk with Mrs. John MacKay. He had not expected a wife. Maybe he should have.

VIII

THE HOUSE of John MacKay was a small ranch style set in a row of identical ranch styles in a middle-priced development. When Shayne arrived it was just after ten o'clock, and the lights were still on. All the lights as if someone in the house wanted to light the way for some returning prodigal.

Shayne sat in his car for a long minute and looked at the house. Someone in the house was alone and waiting. The lights were, perhaps, also a beacon of forgiveness. Come back, all is all right. It is warm and light here, my love—they seemed to say.

Mrs. John MacKay was going to have a long wait.

Shayne got out of his car and walked up the neat, trimmed front path. The door had a bright brass knocker brought from somewhere in Europe. A knocker much too large for the door, but whoever had put it up was very proud of it. A

man with big and secret dreams, perhaps.

Shayne knocked.

Quick, light footsteps hurried to the door.

The woman who opened the door was tall and heavy and in her eyes was a quick light of hope that died in an instant. Shayne felt almost cruel to have even knocked. She was a woman who might have once been pretty, but who had, over the years, let herself go, and had grown fat and older than she was. There was a look in her eye that told Shayne she had been thinking about this lately.

"Mrs. MacKay? May I come in?"

"You're from the police," the woman said. "It's about John."

Shayne had seen it so many times before. A woman, her man secure and safely caught, never has a moment of doubt about it all going on forever. Is there any other possibility? No, so what need is there to please him? Men, too. The same thing.

"I'm a private detective, Mrs. MacKay. I'd like to talk to you."

The woman blinked. She stepped back. "Yes, of course. Come in."

Shayne entered a small but pleasant living room. A nice but dull living room. The woman waved him to a seat.

She sat facing him, her hands gripped together.

"It is John, of course," she said. "How else would you know my name and where he lived? He's been gone over a week. Not a word. I know he's gone. Now you come. Is he in prison? Has he done something?"

"I don't know, Mrs. MacKay," Shayne said truthfully. "You say he left over a week ago?"

"Yes, he just went. Not a word. No note, but two of his suitcases were gone. He's left me; I know that. I don't quite know why, but he's gone. Oh, I know why. I mean that I don't know exactly why. I mean I don't know the specific why this time, why it had to happen just now. I suppose it is my fault, really. I just—never thought—"

Shayne spoke gently. "Do you know a Janis Hill?"

The woman nodded as if Shayne had answered a question rather than made a statement.

"That's her name, is it? Janis Hill. A nice name. Younger than me, of course, smaller and thinner. Not so fat or dowdy. Exciting, right, Mr. Shayne. A woman to go places with. A woman who will give him trouble, but also adventure. Sometimes men who live dull lives, who do dull work, who are not very courageous, have to find their sense of adventure in women alone."

She sat there, broken and miserable, yet not a fool. From time to time she passed her hand over her face as if to brush away some small and invisible insects. When she spoke she stared straight ahead as

if talking to herself. She was talking to herself.

"You don't know Janis Hill?" Shayne said.

The woman blinked. "Know her? No, Mr. Shayne, I don't know her. How would I? I've been so busy. John was so busy. I had so much to do with the house, my bridge club, the Ladies Auxilliary, my neighbors. John worked at Mr. Kiakin's house, quite late sometimes. Nights, too. At least, he said he worked nights, and I never questioned. No, I don't know her name."

"The name Janis Hill means nothing to you?"

"Nothing. Or it never did. Tell me, are they in this trouble together?"

Shayne evaded the question. He would have to tell her soon, but not yet. If she did not know. It had occurred to him that this could be partly an act. Men are killed every day by wives they have deserted for a younger and choicer female.

"You say Mr. MacKay worked a long time for Mr. Kiakin?"

"No, only a few years. But John worked very hard. Mr. Kiakin is a collector, you know, and John catalogued his library collection. It didn't seem even then that it would require so much night work. Of course, now I know, don't I?"

"Perhaps it was something else," Shayne said. "Could he have been in some kind of trouble that you know of?"

"Trouble? You mean here? A trouble that made him leave?"

"Yes," Shayne said. "Perhaps with Mr. Kiakin?"

Mrs. MacKay shook her head. "No, I don't think so. Unless perhaps—"

The woman stopped. Shayne leaned forward.

"Unless what. Mrs. MacKay?"

She blinked again. "Well, I'm not sure, but the day after John vanished that chauffeur came around here. And Miss Minton, yes. I remember I thought it odd. They said John had not been to work, and wondered if I knew where he was. They pretended that they thought he might be at home ill, but now that I think about it, I know they knew he was gone."

She looked at Shayne. "How did they know that? And if they had thought he was just sick why hadn't they simply called first? No, they knew he was gone, and they both came here. Why both of them? Did they expect trouble?"

She looked at Shayne. And her eyes suddenly changed, went very flat. She blinked and stared at Shayne as if she were only now listening to all that Shayne had said since the moment he had entered the house, the moment he had stood before her door. And that was just what she was doing.

She spoke. "He's dead, isn't he? Of course. He's dead, that's why you've been evading. My John is dead!"

Her voice rose to almost a scream. Shayne watched her in the small, dull living room. After her near scream the room became very silent. Shayne waited, watched, and suddenly he saw that her face had changed, had become suddenly hard. No longer only the deserted woman who blamed herself.

"He *is* dead?"

Shayne nodded. "Yes."

"How?"

"Shot, Mrs. MacKay."

"Shot? Shot?" the woman said, and for an instant her eyes seemed to glow. "Then, then he didn't desert me for another woman at all? He was in trouble? He—"

This, too, Mike Shayne had seen. She would grasp at any straw to evade the truth she had thought she was facing. Such is self knowledge. With no way out, she had blamed herself and almost enjoyed it. But given a tiny way out and suddenly she was all innocent. Shayne did not let her get away with it.

"They were both killed, Mrs. MacKay. Your husband, and the woman he was traveling with."

And she changed again. Now all her ways out were gone. She stared, blinked, and began to cry. Shayne watched her. Maybe he had gone too far, but this was murder, and he could not be sure if this was an act. It did not even have to be an act. He had seen people cry for men they had killed before this.

"Dead," she sobbed. "Dead."

Shayne touched her. "Mrs. MacKay, he deserted you with a woman, but that wasn't why he was killed. I'm sure of that. Can you tell me anything more about him?"

The woman shivered. "Dead. John is dead!" She looked up at Shayne. "Do you hear? My John!"

"Mrs. MacKay," Shayne said softly. "Tell me anything at all you know about him."

The woman shuddered. "He gambled."

Her voice was low. Shayne sat back and looked at her where she sat and held her face. The room was silent. In the distance Shayne heard cars passing on the main highway. Mrs. MacKay shuddered again ,and she looked up at Shayne.

"Once, three or four times, I caught him lying about where he'd been. I haven't been telling the whole truth. I caught him lying. I accused him. He admitted it. He gambled. Oh, not a lot, but sometimes. He said he couldn't seem to help himself. He swore he would stop. But I know he didn't. He went over there only a few weeks ago, I know it."

"Over where?" Shayne said.

"A place called *The Purple Barn.* It's a roadhouse, but they have a gambling room in the back. The police know all about it. I—I think Mr. Kiakin even owns part of it!"

"And you know he went?"

"Yes."

"So you knew something. It wasn't quite such a shock."

The woman did not answer.

"Where is this place?"

"About two miles east on the Jericho Turnpike."

"Thank you," Shayne said.

He left her still sitting there. He could hear her begin to sob, a sobbing as if her heart would never stop breaking. And yet, Mike Shayne wondered. She had known more than she had told at the beginning.

In his car he drove on toward *The Purple Barn.* And he wondered even more. Forbes was very careful about Kiakin. The woman said the police knew about the gambling, and that maybe Kiakin owned a piece of the business. It was more than possible that Forbes had more reason than had first appeared to protect Mr. Kiakin.

IX

MIKE SHAYNE eased his rented car into the line of parked cars in front of *The Purple Barn.*

He got out and surveyed the establishment. It was a typical roadhouse. An old brown-painted house that in the day would look very much like any other house. At night it emerged from a shell and glowed with bright light.

Purple lights hung all over it. There was noise and the sound of a band inside. People walked in and out. To the right of the door there was a dining room that seemed to be still busy, even now after eleven o'clock at night. The bar was to the left, and it was both dim and crowded.

Shayne walked around to the side. He saw what he had expected. The building was deeper than first appeared; the rear section had no windows or light.

Shayne went back to the front and entered the roadhouse. Inside the door he turned to the left and walked into the bar. He saw at once that *The Purple Barn* was more than a simple roadhouse.

The bar was crowded, as were the tables around a large dance floor. But no one was facing the bar, or looking at each other at the tables. They were all watching a fast and gaudy line of dancing girls.

The roadhouse was a night club complete with band and floor show. Shayne ordered a sidecar and turned to watch the floor show. There were seven girls, all pretty and most young. And Shayne remembered Janis Hill. He remembered her trick of shoving notes into the corners of mirrors.

Shayne turned away from the loud and bouncy show and watched the bartender. The man was a tall, silent type who hustled the drinkers without them even knowing they were being hustled. There was an air of professionalism about *The Purple Barn* that did not fits its location.

The bartender saw Shayne watching him. That was not hard, Shayne was the only customer not

watching the floor show with his back to the bar. The bartender saw the folded ten in Shayne's hand.

"You want something more?" the bartender said, his eyes not looking at the bill now, but fixed on Shayne's face.

"A few answers to some safe and simple questions," Shayne said.

The bartender bent over to wash some glasses. "If it's worth a ten, they can't be simple, mister. I sell whisky, not answers."

"John MacKay," Shayne said. "Just a word or two. Did he come in here much?"

"MacKay? Can't say I remember the name."

"He liked the back room," Shayne said.

The bartender did not even twitch as he washed the glasses.

"Why would a guy like the storeroom?" the bartender said.

But Shayne saw the imperceptible movement of the bartender's hand as the man deftly pressed a hidden button. Shayne folded the ten and put it back into his pocket and waited. He could see most of the room in the bar mirror. He saw a small door open at the far end of the barroom.

In the mirror he watched the man who came through the door. A stocky man of medium height with the rolling walk of an ex-pug and the scars on his face to match the walk. Shayne judged him quickly: an ex-middleweight; still light on his feet and probably in very good shape; carrying a badly concealed gun in his dinner-jacket pocket. A henchman, but a high henchman.

Shayne waited until the ex-pug was beside him. Then he turned quickly and smiled straight into the surprised gunman's eyes. The gunman had slid up on what he thought was an unsuspecting victim.

"Someone wants to see me," Shayne said. "Good. I want to see the boss. Let's go."

The pug recovered quickly, nodded, and led Mike Shayne back toward the door he had come through without a word. Shayne followed. They entered a dim hallway and then a small private office. In the private office a white-haired hulk of a man looked up. The ex-pug nodded to Shayne.

"He's a wise guy, boss. Want me to—"

In a flash Shayne had the man's dinner jacket by both lapels and pulled hard downward. The next instant the ex-pug was stumbling around the room trying to free his arms from the buttoned coat that pinioned them to his sides, and Shayne held the gun the pug had had in his pocket.

"I'm here because I wanted to see you, not because that punk brought me," Shayne said, and tossed the automatic onto the desk of the big, white-haired boss.

The pug broke loose by popping the buttons off his dinner jacket. In his anger he reverted to his true form. Instead of grabbing for his

pistol, he lunged toward Shayne, fists ready, stance low. Mike Shayne braced.

"Stan!" the white-haired man said. His voice was low and smooth, yet hard as polished steel.

The pug stopped. The white-haired man looked at Shayne.

"You've got trouble, mister. Real trouble. I never saw you, and around here—" the white-haired man began.

"I know," Shayne said drily, "you don't like outsiders. I've talked to Forbes already."

The white-haired man said nothing, but his eyes watched Shayne.

"I'm not interested in your back room," Shayne said. "I don't care what goes on here. I just want to talk about John MacKay."

The white-haired man watched Shayne. Then he suddenly nodded to the ex-pug. "Okay, Stan."

The pug left as if pulled by a string. Mr. White-Haired ran a taut ship.

"Okay, mister. Sit down. I like your style. New York private cop?"

"Miami," Shayne said.

"You're a long way from home. I got friends in Miami. Ray Incavo, know him?"

"I know him," Shayne said, and grinned. "He knows me, too. The name's Shayne."

"Mike Shayne? Yeh, I've heard of you. I'm Lew DiDonna. They call me Joker."

"Okay, Joker. Now how about some words on John MacKay?"

"What kind of words, mister?"

"How often he was here? How much he usually lost? Was he in need of cash? Who was he in trouble with? Like that," Shayne said. "Was he a compulsive gambler? Did you carry him?"

The white-haired DiDonna rubbed at his chin, watched Shayne, then suddenly shrugged.

"Okay, why not? In the first place, Shayne, MacKay didn't lose anything. He never gambled. I don't think he even knew we got a back room. And the only trouble I figure he could get into was with his wife."

Shayne heard it, and for a moment said nothing. He was trying to be sure whether DiDonna were lying or not. He knew that the gambler was not lying.

"His wife?" Shayne said.

"That's right," DiDonna said. MacKay came here regular, like clockwork, only not to gamble. He sat out in the bar and watched the show. After the show he took her home."

"Her?" Shayne said, but he knew the answer already.

"Judy Hickman, one of our dancers. They really had it going big the last six months or so," DiDonna said.

"No gambling? Just a girl?"

"Just a girl," DiDonna said.

Shayne sat silent in the small office of the gambler and thought about Mrs. John MacKay. The wife had been aware that her husband was lying. Maybe she had also been aware of what he really was doing. If she had known all along, it would not have been hard to follow the pair to Miami.

"The Hickman girl," Shayne said, "she's left here?"

"About a week and a half ago," DiDonna said. "We figured she'd run off with MacKay. Not that I blame him. She's a hell of a good-looking kid."

Shayne described Janis Hill to DiDonna.

The white-haired gambler nodded. "Yeh, that's her all right. She's in Miami?"

"They're both in Miami," Shayne said. "They just ran off together? That's all you can tell me?"

"That's all I know, Shayne. It happens every day," DiDonna said.

"Mind if I talk to some of the other girls? They might know more about her," Shayne said.

"Go ahead," DiDonna said. "Tell you what." The gambler looked at his watch. "The show's off. I'll take you back myself."

Shayne followed the big gambler out of the private office and down the corridor of the club to the dressing rooms. The girls sat in a single room on chairs before a long bank of mirrors. They all turned when Shayne and DiDonna came in. The white-haired gambler beamed at the girls. They watched him in a wary silence. Shayne sensed the wariness.

"Girls, this is Mr. Shayne from Miami. He wants to ask you about Judy Hickman. Tell the man all you can, understand?"

Shayne watched the girls, and listened to DiDonna. He heard a faint threat—as if DiDonna were telling the girls *not* to tell Shayne something. The redhead went through the motions of asking questions, and got no answers. The girls knew nothing special about Judy Hickman.

"Come on," DiDonna said, "all you girls tell each other. Mr. Shayne needs help."

But the girls knew nothing except that Judy had fallen for John MacKay, and he for her. That the two of them had decided to elope, without benefit of a divorce for MacKay, and that they had talked of South America. Nothing that Shayne did not already know.

As he asked his questions, Shayne let his eyes roam along the line of female faces. He found eyes watching him closely from the second girl on the left. Shayne watched her. She stared at him, and then

looked away out toward the window of the room. Then her eyes lowered to the floor. Shayne ended the questions.

"I guess that's all I have."

DiDonna walked out with him. "Sorry, Shayne. I guess it's just a matter of true love."

"I guess so," Shayne said. "Thanks."

"Any time," the gambler said.

Shayne left by the front door and walked to his car. He started his engine and pulled out, aware that DiDonna was watching him. He drove out of sight, parked at the side of the road, and walked back. He circled in the night to the window of the dressing room. There was no one inside.

The redhead lit a cigarette and stood in the dark. He heard the faint sound and a small young woman stood near him.

"Mr. Shayne?"

"Yes, honey," Shayne said.

"Ask Mr. Kiakin. Judy was his girl friend before MacKay came along."

"Kiakin owns this club?"

"I think some of it. Good-by."

The girl was gone. Shayne stood and tugged slowly on his ear. Judy Hickman, alias Janis Hill, had been Kiakin's girl. Kiakin was a man of much power. He might not like losing his girl. Had Murry Lester fingered MacKay and the Hickman girl for Kiakin's killers, and then come to report? It was possible.

Shayne walked back to his car. As he neared the car he stopped. Another car was parked near his rented car. The other car was a town police car. In the dark Shayne blended into the trees and watched the familiar figure of the burly sergeant walking around his car.

Obviously they were watching him, knew his license number. And he had a hunch that he did not have enough yet to justify Forbes letting him get to Kiakin.

But Kiakin had the key; he was sure of that.

He turned on his heel and walked away in the night. He could pick up the car at any time. He walked two miles and found a motel. He checked in under an assumed name, and went to his cabin. Inside he went to bed.

In the morning he would get another car and make his call on Kiakin, whether Forbes liked it or not.

X

WHEN MORNING came, Mike Shayne was up soon after the sun, dressed, and at the window of the motel room. He studied the parking area in front of the motel. All was quiet and still. Cars passed on the highway from time to time, but at this early hour traffic was still light.

Shayne slipped out of his room and crossed the road to the other side. There were no police cars in sight. He began to walk. They would expect him to either return

to his rented car, or to try to hire another car. So he would walk, keeping his eyes alert for any sign of a police car.

He had been walking about ten minutes when a truck stopped and picked him up. The truck driver took him to the turn-off toward the north shore just this side of Oyster Bay, only a mile from the entrance to Kiakin's mansion.

He thanked the driver and walked north. As he got closer to Kiakin's mansion he became more alert. About half a mile away from the mansion the road curved near to the shore. Shayne left the road and crossed to the rocky beach. He followed the beach around until he came to the rear of the Kiakin house.

Shayne moved up from the beach cautiously, taking advantage of all the cover he could find. Luckily, there was plenty of cover right up to the house itself. When he reached the house, he circled it close to the walls. All was quiet and deserted, no one around outside that the detective could see.

He took a deep breath and walked up to the front door. He pushed the bell. The door opened and the same butler stood there. The butler saw Shayne and started to close the door. Shayne threw his weight against the door and was inside.

"Hold it," Shayne snapped. "Before you call the police, or raise the alarm, you better tell Mr. Kiakin that Shayne knows all about the statue."

The butler hesitated. A voice spoke from the left.

"Let him come in, Graves."

Shayne looked and saw Murry Lester standing in the doorway of a large living room. The small, dapper art dealer was watching Mike Shayne closely.

"But—" the butler began.

"Tell Mr. Kiakin, and say we are in the library," Lester said.

The butler went away, and Lester took Shayne through the large living room into the library where Shayne had seen the four people yesterday evening. Once in the library, the art dealer turned sharply.

"Just who are you?"

"Mike Shayne," the redhead said. "A private detective from Miami, Lester. Judy Hickman was killed in my apartment. Or, to be exact, she died in my apartment."

Lester stared. "In your apartment?"

"That's right, and—"

Shayne stopped. The door had opened and three people came into the room. The chauffeur walked first toward Shayne. The detective looked beyond the chauffeur at the small, mustachioed, grey-haired man with the saturnine face.

"Call him off, Kiakin, or I might have to hurt him!"

"Why you punk—" the chauffeur began.

"George!" Kiakin snapped.

The chauffeur stopped and glared sullenly at Mike Shayne. Kiakin walked slowly forward, followed by the Minton woman in another severe mannish suit. The rich man stopped close to Shayne and looked up at him.

"I understood that Forbes had informed you that I had no wish to see you, Mr. Shayne?" Kiakin said.

"Forbes informed me," Shayne said.

Lester spoke up. "He said he knows all about the statue."

There was a silence. They all looked at Shayne. The big redhead grinned and sat down in the most comfortable leather chair. Kiakin motioned for everyone else to sit down except the chauffeur, George, who stood with his arms folded and his back against the door. Kiakin stood in front of his desk.

"What do you know about the statue?" Kiakin snapped.

Shayne lighted a cigarette. "First, let's talk about Judy Hickman."

Kiakin's face darkened in fury. "That little tramp! After all I did! The stupid little—"

"She was your girl friend?" Shayne said bluntly.

Kiakin stared. "That, Shayne, is none of—"

Shayne broke in. "She's dead, Kiakin, and so is MacKay. Murdered, both of them. Jealousy is a pretty good motive. Can you prove where you were two days ago?"

Kiakin laughed suddenly. "You think that I— You think I killed them? Shayne, women are, shall we say, a dime a dozen. For a man like me they are a dime a thousand. I am a very rich man."

"Rich men get madder than poor men," Shayne said drily.

Kiakin bristled. "I can prove where I was."

"And your boys? George there, or Miss Minton?"

Kiakin began to pace. Then he turned again to Mike Shayne.

"Listen, Mr. Shayne, my only interest in all of this, and in Judy or MacKay, is my statue! Yes, my statue! Let me fill you in, if it will help clear the air and induce you to tell us what you know."

Kiakin resumed his pacing as he talked. "A week and a half ago MacKay and Judy suddenly vanished. Well, I guessed what had happened. I'm not a fool. I knew that something was going on. Sure, I was angry. I treated both of them well. No man likes to lose his woman, even if she is only a two-bit dancer.

"But I had my tantrum of anger, and then I wrote them off. Until I discovered that the statue was missing! It is, you must know, a priceless T'ang piece. Unique, nothing like it on earth! It was one of my prized possessions, and I do not give up my possessions easily.

"Two days after they vanished it became clear that they had taken it. Judy had taken it. She was the only person who could have. You see, I am, like all men, foolish with

ladies. Judy had a key to this house! She must have come in the night they ran, and taken the statue.

"Well, I instantly sent George and Miss Minton to see if they could find MacKay and Judy. They could not. They traced them to New York, and then to Miami. George even went to Miami. Well, he did not locate them. But about five days ago they contacted me!"

Shayne was watching the saturnine man. As Kiakin talked his face became darker and darker as anger built up in him. The small grey man paced faster.

"You didn't report the theft to the police?" Shayne said.

"Report? Of course not! Shayne, I don't think you quite understand. That piece is worth a great deal of money, but who would buy it? No, it is a well-known piece. Anyone who would know its value, would know that it belongs to Kiakin! No one would buy it!"

"Then—" Shayne began.

Kiakin waved his small hand. "Ransom, Mr. Shayne! The theft was not a theft but a kidnaping. The kidnaping of my statue. I told you I am no fool. I realized instantly that Judy and MacKay could not sell it. Then why steal it? I have more easily sold items.

"No, it was clear that they would attempt to sell it back to me under threat of destroying it! A ransom. The police? Never. If my child were kidnaped, I would ransom him. I would not go to the police."

Shayne nodded. "Go on."

Kiakin paced. "In Miami they contacted Lester there. They told him they had the statue, and that I would pay fifty thousand dollars or they would destroy it. What is fifty thousand dollars to me? Nothing, but that statue is my finest piece. Naturally I agreed at once. Lester set up an appointment. But they never kept it. Instead the police kept it. The rest you must know."

Shayne nodded. "Someone got to the Hickman girl and to MacKay, and killed them before they could meet Lester. Whoever it was, was also looking for the statue. The question is, who knew about the statue? Who could have known it was gone?"

"No one," Kiakin said.

"They might have been careless," Lester said. "I've thought about it, Shayne. Perhaps they took it to some other dealer to be appraised to be sure they had the right statue. Any dealer would know it. Someone might have guessed that it was stolen, and decided to hi-jack it."

It was a possible theory, Shayne admitted to himself. In fact it was a good theory.

"Perhaps their murders had nothing to do with the statue," Miss Minton said.

Shayne looked at the severe woman. That, too, was a possible theory. And yet, Shayne did not like that theory. Not with the three

men looking for something in his apartment.

Kiakin suddenly swore. "They were ready to sell it back! What the devil do I care about fifty thousand dollars? Now someone has killed them, and where is my statue? I don't care who killed them, but why don't the killers contact me? It makes no difference to me who I buy it back from."

Shayne felt a little sick. The small grey man cared only for his statue. And then Shayne had the thought, a faint hint of another possible motive. The statue was all that Kiakin cared about—but what if someone did not want the statue returned?

Shayne rubbed his gaunt chin. MacKay and the Hickman girl had been killed *before* they could return the statue. Was it possible that somone did not want Kiakin to get his statue back, and wanted it enough to kill for that?

Shayne looked around. "Who hit me in the den the other day?"

"I did," Miss Minton said calmly. "I did not like your story. I could see that you were armed. Naturally, I was alarmed. So I hit you and then we carried you out and called the police."

"Why carry me out?"

Kiakin shrugged. "We did not wish to disturb whoever has the statue. If we left you inside, the police would want to know more about who you were and why you were here. I did not want the police to know about the statue. So we carried you out, and told Forbes you had trespassed."

Shayne nodded. "I could have been here about the statue."

"I did not think so," Miss Minton said. "You would have told me so."

"Well, that shows how wrong a girl can be," Shayne said. "I am here about the statue. I know where it is."

The silence in the room could have been the silence of a tomb ten thousand miles underground. Lester sat up, licked his lips as if unable to be sure he should believe Shayne. Kiakin stopped in his pacing, his eyes hard and staring at Mike Shayne as if warning the detective that what he was saying had better be true.

"You know where the statue is? You?" Kiakin said.

Miss Minton had let her mouth fall open, but recovered quickly. The severe-looking secretary had an expression of disbelief on her mannish face. George, the chauffeur, moved away from the door and stood alert as if sensing he might be needed.

"In fact," Shayne said with a thin smile, "I happen to *have* the statue."

Kiakin was a direct man. "How much? Tell me! How much must I pay you?"

"You have it?" Murry Lester said.

"Do you really expect us to be-

lieve that?" Miss Minton said. "If you have it, where is it?"

"In Miami," Shayne said. "And I'm not selling it. I'll take my regular price, Kiakin. Three day's work. My secretary will bill you. Expenses, too. That's all. I'm a detective, not a statue kidnaper. Just prove that it's yours to the Miami police, and I turn it over. Send Lester with me to pick it up."

Kiakin was a man of quick action. He barked his orders. Lester produced the proper papers from the wealthy man's safe. Miss Minton got busy on the telephone to make plane reservations. George went for the car.

Shayne watched them all. They were so eager for the statue that they had all forgotten that this was a case of murder!

Shayne had not forgotten.

And he was sure now that the statue was the key to double murder.

XI

THE BIG BLACK Rolls-Royce made the short trip to Kennedy International in record time. Lester and Shayne boarded their jet with twenty minutes to spare. The chauffeur, George, and Miss Minton remained in the car with Kiakin. As the jet taxied away, Mike Shayne saw the three of them out of the car and watching the departure.

Shayne was alert.

He was sure that somewhere between New York and the time he handed the statue to Lester, the killer would strike again.

So he sat alert the whole way to Miami.

But nothing happened.

Shayne smiled to himself. That was exactly what he had expected. The killer did not want to miss the statue this time. The killer had already killed twice without getting the statue, and Shayne was sure that the killer would try not to make that mistake again.

He was alert, then, but did not really expect trouble until after Miami was reached.

The jet came into Miami, and Shayne and Lester changed to the detective's car. They drove into the sunny city without incident. Shayne dropped the art dealer at his elegant shop. Lester objected.

"I think Mr. Kiakin would want me to go with you, Shayne."

"He probably would, but this is my show. You just sit tight, and I'll bring the statue to you. I want the police here when I do."

Shayne drove on to his Flagler Street office. But on the way he stopped and called Lieutenant Bellow. He told Bellow to bring some men and cover the exits from the Flagler Street building, and come up to his office.

Then he drove on.

He parked and walked slowly into his building. He took his time, and then went up in the elevator. When he reached his floor all

seemed quiet and normal. He walked on to his office and went inside. Lucy Hamilton looked up and smiled.

"How was New York, Michael?" the brown-eyed woman said.

"Interesting, Angel," Shayne said. His grey eyes glanced around. "All quiet?"

"Nice and peaceful, Michael," his secretary said.

"Stay alert, Angel, I'm going to get that statue."

Shayne went into his private office and locked the door. He checked his automatic and clicked off the safety. He put the weapon into his coat pocket instead of into its holster. Then he opened the safe and took out the statue. He placed the statue inside a paper bag.

Then he took a deep breath, held his gun inside his pocket, unlocked the door, and went back into the outer office. Bellow should just about have time to get to the building. He did not want the lieutenant to arrive too soon.

"Stay back, Angel," Shayne said softly, "We may have a little action."

Shayne opened his outer door and stepped out. He began to walk down the corridor toward the elevators. His grey eyes seemed to be looking at nothing in particular, but they were watching every inch of the corridor.

He saw the movement of the stairway door.

He reached the elevator, and

turned sideways to the stairway door to press the elevator button.

The stairway door opened.

Shayne whirled, his automatic already out.

Two men stood in the stairway door. One was the man who had first attacked him and then had come back with the other two to search his apartment. The other man was the leader of the three whose face Mike Shayne had not seen. Now he saw the face, and he did not recognize it.

The two men were a few steps through the door when they suddenly knew that Shayne was ready for them.

"Hold it there!" Shayne called, his automatic steady on them.

The leader did not hesitate a second—he turned and dove back for the door.

The man who had first attacked Shayne was either dumber or braver. He clawed for his gun and got it out before Shayne fired. The single shot caught the man full in the chest. The force of the .45 bullet hurled the man like a sack of flour up and back against the wall.

The man bounced off the wall and pitched forward in a heap. He lay there. Shayne ran toward the door. The second man had made it through and was tumbling down the stairs. Shayne leaped over the fallen man and went through the stairs door at full speed.

He raced down after the fleeing leader of the attackers.

"Bellow!" Shayne shouted. "Head him off! Take him!"

There were footsteps below and then shots. Shayne ran on down and reached the ground floor. Lieutenant Bellow stood over the fallen man. Bellow looked at Shayne.

"He fought," Bellow said.

"Is he dead?"

One of Bellow's men looked up. "No, just wounded. I think he'll make it."

"Who is he?" Bellow said.

"I don't know," Shayne said, "but he's a killer. Come on, George."

The redhead led Bellow and two of his men out of the building. On the sidewalk Shayne stopped and turned.

"I'm going to Lester's shop, George. I'm going alone. I want you to follow close behind, but don't be seen. When I go inside the shop, then move in and fast."

"Tell me about it, Mike," Bellow said.

"I can't. I don't know for sure. But I think I'll hand you a double killer."

Shayne walked quickly to his car, got in, and drove off. He lit a cigarette. The two attackers had acted just about as he had expected. They had come to get the statue, but they had not expected or wanted a fight. They were hired hand, and what Shayne wanted was the one who had hired them.

Shayne reached the shop of Murry Lester. He saw that Bellow was behind him, but out of sight from the shop. He parked, took up the paper bag with the statue in it, and stepped out of the car. He walked the few steps to the door of the shop and went inside.

He walked briskly through the quiet shop where the lady salespeople were in low conversation with restrained customers. To the door of Murry Lester's private office. And went in.

Lester looked up from his desk. "Shayne! You have it?"

Shayne placed the paper bag on the table. Lester reached eagerly for the bag. Shayne watched him carefully, and watched all around too.

He saw the closet door, the rear

door that went out into an alley, the two barred windows that opened into the alley.

He stood where he could also see the door he had come through.

Lester had the bag open and the statue out. The art dealer's eyes glistened as he looked at the beautiful green statue.

For an endless instant the whole world seemed to be silent as Shayne stood and Lester looked at the statue.

Murry Lester suddenly frowned, leaned close to the green statue.

Lester leaned further, began to say, "But—"

And Shayne saw the shadow at the window.

Shayne dove over the desk.

The shot rang out.

A second shot and a third.

Shayne had hit Lester full on the side and both men had gone down sprawling on the floor, out of the line of fire from the window. The two men lay there as the second and third shot blasted the room with a smashing of glass.

Shayne raised up and fired three shots straight at the window. The shadow on the window vanished.

Out in the alley there were shouts, and then firing.

Feet pounded through the shop and into the room where Shayne and Lester were just getting up. Bellow stood there with his pistol drawn and looking down.

Shayne leaped up and everyone followed him through the locked rear door, after he unlocked it, out into the alley. Far down at the end of the alley near a small car a cluster of four men stood over a figure.

Shayne and Bellow and Lester ran to the spot. They all looked down. Bellow looked at Shayne. Shayne nodded as if he had expected what he saw. Lester stared.

"Miss Minton!" Lester said.

One of the policeman turned to Bellow. "She made us shoot her. She wouldn't stop. I guess she's dead."

Bellow turned to Shayne. "Who is she?"

"The private secretary to a Mr. Kiakin who owns the statue. Lester here can tell you the rest."

Bellow looked at Lester. The art dealer looked down at the dead woman, and then at Shayne.

"A fake," Lester said. "The statue was a fake. I don't understand."

Lieutenant Bellow watched Shayne. "Mike?"

"Pick her up and let's go down to Headquarters and I'll tell you the whole story."

Shayne began to talk as they walked out of the alley, and the other police remained with the body of Miss Minton to be picked up by the meat wagon.

IT WAS THE next day in Lieutenant Bellow's office. Mike Shayne sat and smoked. Bellow had the file open in front of him.

"I got word from Kiakin up in New York that he's still checking his collection, but it looks like half of it is fake so far," Bellow said.

Shayne nodded. "It was a big haul; it had to be for two murders. Probably another month or so and she'd have cleaned Kiakin out."

"Yeh," Bellow said, "that's what the hood we took alive is telling. The whole story. They had it going about six months. She was the master mind. She had duplicates made of pieces, shipped the real pieces down here, and the gang sold them to not-so-honest collectors. Some of the stuff they broke up for the jewels."

"Then Judy Hickman and MacKay loused it up by stealing the T'ang statue," Shayne said. "As simple as that. They stole the statue to sell back, and Minton knew that the instant Murry Lester saw the statue he'd know it was fake. Lester had sold it to Kiakin in the first place. Once he saw it she was cooked. The whole scheme would come out, and who else could have worked it but her?"

"So she alerted her boys and they went after the statue, and MacKay and the Hickman girl," Bellow said. "Our singing hood says they got to the Hickman girl at her motel, but she slipped out the window. They caught her again, had a fight, and she slipped them a second time. They had already found MacKay and killed him. But she didn't come to MacKay's place, she got into your place by mistake! That was what really cooked them. Just a lousy mistake."

"It's always just a lousy mistake," Shayne said.

Bellow watched him. "You sort of had it all guessed?"

Shayne nodded. "Three things, George. First, right from the start I had a funny feeling. MacKay and Hickman were scared and hiding, but not that scared—not murder scared. I got the idea that there was something they didn't know. Something that got them killed."

"They didn't know the statue was a fake, and the Minton woman was after them," Bellow said.

"Right. They knew Kiakin would try to find them, so hid out. But they also knew he wouldn't risk the statue, so were not too scared of anything happening to them. They just didn't know about Minton and her gang of thieves.

"Second," Shayne went on, "I wondered about one strange part of it—that MacKay and Hickman had been killed *before* they could get to Lester. Before they produced the statue, and before the killer got it. It almost looked like someone wanted to prevent the statue being returned!

"Third, when I was hit up there in New York, the reason they gave me wasn't good enough. I mean, with the statue missing, if figured they would have at least talked to me. But they hit me before I could say a word. I suddenly figured that

what had happened was that someone in the house knew me.

"Only the Minton woman had seen me, and the only way she could have known me on sight was that one of the men who had attacked me in Miami had reported to her! So she had to be mixed up with the boys down here. She hit me to stop me getting to Kiakin. You see, George, her whole action was aimed not at getting the statue, but at preventing the statue from getting back to Kiakin or Lester!"

There was a long silence. Finally Lieutenant Bellow sighed. He looked at Shayne.

"All because two lovers decided to run off and wanted a stake to start on. Ironic, isn't it? Her whole scheme shot by a love-sick librarian and his dancing girl."

"Life is ironic, George," Shayne said.

The two men smoked and thought about that.

MIKE SHAYNE Leads Next Issue With—

UNDERSTUDY FOR MURDER

A New Complete Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Of all the cases Mike Shayne had worked on, this was indeed the most baffling. For somewhere in the Miami night a killer was prowling, looking for another victim, while the craggy-jawed redhead was fighting to find out why the price of a coveted screen test—had to be Murder!

THE WISDOM OF THE WICKED

by NORMAN DANIELS

She was lovely, desirable
. . . yet poison to his plans.
So—she must die . . .

IT WAS summer's end at the lake. Summer is the finish of many things. Of the bright greenness of upper Wisconsin, of fishing seasons, of sun-warmth in which to

bask on the sandy beach of the lake—sand by courtesy of the Atlantic Ocean via frieght car. Of friendships and romance. Oh, most certainly romance—and sometimes the end of life.

That he would have to kill Doris was an already established fact in Malcolm's mind. Doris was young and quite attractive. She'd needed to hear his siren song just once and then she'd gone with him to spend the summer.

She came out of a small town all-night diner in Ohio. She had no relatives, few friends and she'd been actually seething with the desire for something more than wrestling coffee urns, flipping hot cakes and exchanging wise cracks with truck drivers and salesmen.

Malcolm appealed to her. In a rented car, equipped with new luggage, a typewriter in a leather case, plenty of clothes and money, he must have looked like Santa Claus on a spring day. So she'd gone with him because he wanted company and she wanted something more than the diner.

Obviously, he couldn't keep his identity secret from her. From everyone else, it was easy. He was merely here on a vacation and he'd rented a modest cabin for the season. When it was over, he'd go home.

That was all there was to it—except for Doris.

His primary purpose in spending the season at this small lake resort was to insure privacy and quiet. He was writing a book, his sixth. It was to be a thick volume on philosophy, a real egg-head thing of many pages, and it was difficult to write. Working at home with Virginia and the two kids around was utterly impossible. He'd proven that before.

But these lonely cabins were too lonely and when he met Doris, he thought he had the answer to that. The kid would enjoy living in what was, to her, comparative luxury, and he'd have the companionship his warm and generous nature demanded.

Doris discovered who he was within a week. They'd had an ideal trip up to that time. They'd boated and swam, eaten too much, had a few drinks and a lot of laughs and then she found out he was Malcolm Merriweather, most eminent philosopher, a man who strung degrees after his name as an Admiral of the Fleet adds his decorations.

She also knew he was married, with two children. This didn't set well with Doris at first, but then she accepted it.

"I've rented this cabin under the name of William Corbin," he told her. "And I have given an entirely false home address. If it became known that Malcolm Merriweather was here, our privacy would be invaded and I'd have to make silly speeches and attend boring teas, and there'd be reporters. It would be impossible to remain. So if you

wish to continue having a good time, just forget who I really am."

She saw his picture in one of the books. He looked much younger without those heavy, jet-black rimmed glasses he always wore. Doris was naive enough to ask him about them.

"Oh," he passed it off, "I can see all right, but a philosopher is supposed to look scholarly and, for some reason, this type of frame makes a man look as if he has lived within the covers of a million books and, therefore, must be wise."

She was a pretty little thing, especially in a yellow bathing suit which she wore almost all the time because she said it was so comfortable. She liked to curl up like a kitten before the fireplace in the cabin, when the nights were cool, and toast her slowly browning body at the embers and let Malcolm talk. Occasionally she asked questions, which pleased him.

"What's a philosopher?" she wanted to know. That was one of the very first questions.

"Well," he told her, "without being vain about it, a philosopher is a man who thinks."

Actually, he could tell she didn't care, but she was smart enough to compliment him, cater to his ego, which was above average. She'd been fresh and young and full of fun at first.

So unlike Virginia, who would have doled out his drinks, measured his hours of work, controlled his moments of pleasure, as she'd done last year when he'd written his fifth book.

It had come out very well indeed. He thought it was the best he'd ever done and his publishers had put it in for a Pulitzer. Forlorn hope, but the gesture made him feel good. He'd resented Virginia's interference then and resolved to get away when he began another book.

Well, now it was time to go home again. To his college classes, his lecture tours, to his wife and his two daughters who hated him because he was the squarest of the square. It would have delighted Malcolm Merriweather no end to have been in a position to tell those two teenaged brats that all of his ideas were not cornball and he was perfectly capable of creating a good time for himself as much as any of their clique.

Back also to the final perfecting of Book Six, followed by the eye-searing, back-breaking task of proofing all those pages of galleys. No one had any mercy on him. They paid him well, they honored him lavishly, but they made him work for it.

Doris had made the summer work weeks go swiftly and smoothly. He discovered that he could write and think at considerable depth, even while she rubbed the back of his neck or ran her fingers through his thinning hair, or perhaps curled up on his lap and pestered him to quit and go for a swim.

It wasn't until the summer was nearing its end that she made the first of several vague suggestions.

"We had so much fun," she said. "It shouldn't be allowed to end."

But it was going to end. A philosopher of such eminence as Malcolm Merriweather could hardly be expected to turn his back on his marriage to take up with a cheap little waitress.

Then she'd become slightly more direct. "I don't see any reason why you can't get a divorce. I know you make enough money so all you'd have to do is pay your wife so much, just like you do now. Dear, then you could leave her and we'd be together and it wouldn't cost you much more. I wouldn't ask for anything except to be with you."

It was all highly complimentary, but as impossible as it was pleasant to hear. Then she'd made her first veiled threat.

"It ain't very nice, you and me together like this all summer. There could be some trouble—if I wanted to make some."

Then for the first time, he thought of killing her. She'd promptly asked for it a few days later, as far as he was concerned.

"I ain't taking this without a fight, Professor," she said. "You ain't just walking out like I was some common woman of the streets."

Her use of the word 'ain't' irritated him tremendously. He couldn't imagine himself with a wife like this. Impossible!—But the threat was real. He began putting his facile mind to work in search of some scheme which wouldn't fail.

It should really not be heard, he told himself. After all, he was considered a foremost scholar and thinker. If he couldn't concoct a plan to kill this girl and get away with it, then no one could.

The plan would have to be a simple one. The deed itself would have to be done quickly. The fewer flourishes about it, the less planning in detail, the better would be his chances of success.

Therefore, he concluded—just as he finished the book and the summer—that it would be accomplished immediately after they left the lake. No one there knew who he was. The cabin had been sufficiently isolated so that very few people ever saw him and Doris together.

Doris may have sensed some-

thing, for she was very quiet as they packed to leave. So far, he hadn't committed himself one way or the other and she wasn't holding her breath waiting for an affirmative reply.

They put their luggage in the car. Her case in the back seat, his locked in the trunk. That was by premeditation, but she saw nothing suspicious in this. They left the cabin early in the morning and drove through the still sleeping lakefront so that no one saw them.

"Well," she said, "it's about time you told me where I stand, Professor."

"I intend to," he said in a sympathetic voice. "We'll stop over in some town tonight and have a long talk about how we shall accomplish all this."

She brightened immediately. "Then you're going to get rid of your wife for me? Honest, Professor, I knew all along you would. You just ain't the kind of a man who'd do this to a girl."

He smiled and reassured her with a pat of his hand. He drove with those big black-rimmed glasses because, under the law, he was required to. It said so on his operator's license and he wanted no trouble with the police. It had always been a blow to his vanity that he actually needed glasses. Now, as they reached this town shortly after dark, he removed them.

He pulled in to the curb, a block and a half away from a large neon sign advertising the Park Savoy Hotel. It was a old five story, red brick, structure. Perhaps at one time this had been a way station for traveling salesmen, but now it catered to motorists who wanted a little more than a motel room.

"You go in and register alone," he said. "After half an hour you come out and I'll be waiting for you. You can then tell me the number of your room and I'll meet you there."

He saw her truly for the first time then. She laughed in his face. Such a pretty face to take on such cupidity. He hated her all of a sudden and he was glad she'd turned avaricious and unreasonable. It would be much easier to kill her now.

"What kind of a sucker do you think I am, Professor? Once I checked in there, that'd be the last I'd ever see of you."

"I don't like this mistrust on your part," he said severely. "Not after what we've been through. If you refuse to accept my word now, what in the world is the sense of our getting married?"

"I'd trust you then," she said candidly.

"Then I must prove to you that I'm not running out," he said. "Therefore I give you my wallet, with almost all my money and all of my identification. Parking is unrestricted here, so I give you the keys to the car. You know very well there are only two in the set and you may hold them.

"I would even give you the manuscript of my book except that it is locked in the car trunk and I don't wish to be put to the bother of getting it for such a silly reason as to allay your foolish suspicions."

She took the wallet and the keys and she was satisfied enough. "I guess you mean it all right," she said. "Okay, Professor. I'll be back in a few minutes."

She took the single light bag with her. He watched her walk gracefully and happily down the deserted small town street. It was really too bad, what he had to do. If she'd only been reasonable. If she'd be content with some money, for instance. But no, she was going for the whole thing. All the way.

He sat in the car, putting the final touches to his scheme. It was so simple it would work. Nobody knew him in this town. He had never been here before in his life.

He could walk the street, let fifty people see him and not one would remember him again. Because he would do nothing to attract any attention to himself and even if he did, how would they recognize and remember someone they had never before seen in their lives and never would see again? He took off his glasses and put them in his pocket. Without them, he looked quite different.

The thinker in him examined each little phase of the plan. A quick, uncomplicated killing. Get out of the hotel without being seen, go to the car, drive away, arrive home tomorrow evening and be with his family as Doris' body was discovered. There was nothing more to it than that.

He felt easy of mind, relaxed and quite prepared to go through with it. He even grew impatient at the moments it required for Doris to register alone, go to her room and then come out again, presumably for a walk.

She reached the car and popped in beside him. "I'm in five hundred eight," she said. "There's nobody in the lobby except the desk clerk who's half asleep. And you can get in through the back if you want to. Nobody's there. Just climb the stairs."

"Very well," he said. "Go back now. I'll be there in ten minutes."

She didn't move. "I don't know if I like the way you're going at this, Professor. You act like there's more on your mind than just talking this over."

He smiled affectionately. He couldn't be angry. So she was actually using that futile little brain of hers. And in a direct challenge to his massive thinking machine. He could afford to smile and be tolerrant.

"I shall explain it all carefully once more," he said. "Dear Doris, try to get it through your pretty head this time. If my wife can prove you and I have spent a great deal of time together, then she will get the majority of my wealth, my

future royalties, my house and all else. You would be the one to actually suffer.

"Therefore, it's to your advantage that we not be seen together. If there is an amicable separation, my wife will get her fair share and no more. There will be something left for you."

"I guess that's right," Doris admitted. "But you can't blame a girl for being suspicious. I got an awful lot at stake."

She had indeed. Malcolm Merriweather sent her back to the hotel. He didn't have the keys to the car, but he could make the doors lock automatically and this he did as he prepared to follow her.

It was incredibly easy. The back way in, not a soul saw him. He wouldn't have bothered to duck if anyone came along. His heavy glasses were tucked in his pocket, he moved jauntily, almost happily, because it was going to be over soon now.

She had the door unlocked and she was waiting for him. He closed the door behind him and locked it. Then he sat down.

"We're going to leave very early in the morning," he said, "so it might be wise if you get sufficient sleep."

"But we were going to talk—"

"I'll tell you my plans as you prepare for bed, my dear. It's all very simple. We shall drive back tomorrow. I'll slip out alone at dawn. I'll wait in the car. By the way, I shall need my keys and I'd prefer you give them to me now so there'll be no possibility of my forgetting them. Also, my wallet."

She placed the articles on the dresser. "I guess I got to trust you all right."

"That's fine. I'll drop you off at a hotel in my town. I'll go on home and tell my wife, move out of the house and talk to my attorney. After that I shall be free to see you whenever and wherever I wish."

She came over and put her arms around his neck and kissed him. "I guess I got you all wrong, Professor. We're going to have a fine time. I'll do all I can to make you happy."

All you have to do, he told himself, is die quietly and without fussing about it.

When she climbed into bed a litlte later, he felt that she was very, very lovely and what he had to do was indeed a shame. He snatched the pillow from alongside her head, drove it down over her face, straddled her and held her struggling arms and legs so there was really no sound beyond their soft flapping against the bed sheets.

It didn't take long. He was quite surprised at how speedily the act was completed. He made absolutely certain she was dead and then he searched her handbag, just in case she had with her some souvenir from the lake.

She had nothing. He left her cheap jewelry and even a small

framed photograph of herself which she'd had taken back in the town where she came from. He methodically listed in his mind every spot his fingers touched, and now he wiped them all clean. There was nothing more to do but hang the *Do Not Disturb* sign on the outside of the door as he left. He handled this, and the doorknobs, with handkerchief covered fingers.

He had been in the room about one hour. It was now five minutes of nine. He went down the back way as before and met no one. He boldly opened the door and stepped out to the street and the boy and girl in the car parked at the curb, drew apart quickly and guiltily from their embrace.

He smiled at them and went on his way. What did it matter? They had never seen him before. They'd forget what he looked like by morning, they'd never see him again.

The same went for the man who was selling newspapers at a stand outside the hotel. He hadn't been there when Doris checked in, nor when Malcolm entered by the back door. He was selling a big city newspaper, so it was probably an edition that arrived late and people would come out to buy it.

The man almost hit him in the face with one of the newspapers as he urged him to buy it. Malcolm murmured a polite rejection of the offer and went on.

His car was at the curb exactly as he'd left it. He took the keys from his pocket. He did not, of course, wish to be seen getting into the car. People remember cars better than they do faces. He almost reached it when the old tow truck turned the corner and pulled right in behind his car.

He veered off, certain the man in the tow truck hadn't the slightest idea the sedan belonged to this stranger who was idly strolling down the street. The mechanic hopped down, nodded pleasantly to Malcolm and ambled on down the street in the direction of a restaurant.

Malcolm gave him two minutes before he unlocked the car door, started the motor and pulled away. He was in no hurry and he showed no signs of panic. Tomorrow they'd find Doris. It would be one of those mysteries, deceptive in its simplicity and defying solution. If anyone remembered seeing a stranger in the neighborhood, it would have no meaning.

By day after tomorrow, Malcolm would be a thousand five hundred miles from here,—a town he had never visited in his life before. He didn't even know the name of it and didn't want to know.

At no time had he felt fear. He never had in all his life. He was the thinker, the man who knew how to apply reasoning to all his actions. He wouldn't be connected with the girl, or if he was, by some remote circumstance, it would be as her

companion at the lake many miles away. There was no one to truly identify him in this town where the murder took place. He was secure because he was the rare type of man who knew how to plan well.

He took his time driving back. The next evening he stayed at a motel openly and under his own name. He read the newspapers, but found no mention of a murder. He spent a little time working on his book and he phoned Virginia around ten at night to tell her he was on his way back and the work was an accomplished fact.

"That's wonderful," she said. "Hurry home."

That was quite wonderful too. She'd never said that before. He questioned her mildly.

"I won't tell you why it's important that you hurry. It'll be a surprise, Malcolm. A heavenly surprise."

He tried to figure it out, but even a philosopher needs more than vagueness to solve a mystery. When he pulled into the driveway of his home the next evening, he was thoroughly at ease. The book was done, the summer was over and Doris was destroyed.

Virginia met him with a hug. She hadn't kissed him in many years and she didn't now. The hug was surprise enough, and Malcolm's two daughters kissed and hugged him enthusiastically.

"Now," he said, "I would like to know what this is all about."

Virginia showed him the newspaper. His picture was on the front page. A picture in which he was not wearing his big glasses because he was vain enough not to want that. Below, the caption stated that he had just won the Pulitzer Prize for his last year's book.

"Isn't it wonderful?" Virginia asked.

"I—don't know her," he said slowly. "I will deny ever having seen her in all my life."

"Who?" Virginia asked. "Who in the world are you talking about?"

"I'm rid of her," he went on. "I'm finished with her."

But he knew he wasn't. The philosopher's brain told him he wasn't. How could he be, when her body had been discovered and her picture was in the newspaper, right alongside his own?

She had won death, he had won the Pulitzer and anyone who looked at these two pictures, both released nationwide by the same news agency, would see the murdered girl and those who had seen the stranger in that town, would see him again.

He didn't tell Virginia. He merely went up to his room and locked the door and sat there and waited.

The police would come. They were bound to. Murderer and victim were pictured in alinement. He had to face it now.

But then, he could be philosophical about it. After all, he was a highly educated man with more than his share of brain power. There might be a way out. There was in fact.

But only one. And it added up to death . . . By his own hand or by the State's.

He shrugged. He was, after all, a philosopher. Now it didn't matter either way . . .

READ—This Splendid New Complete Novel in the JUNE Issue of:

THE GIRL FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

THE DEADLY DRUG AFFAIR

A New APRIL DANCER and MARK SLATE Novel

By ROBERT HART DAVIS

You've read the rest—now read the best! Yes, if you've thrilled to the famous "Man from U.N.C.L.E."—and who hasn't?—you'll be equally thrilled by its great new spy-adventure counterpart—"The Girl from U.N.C.L.E. Magazine." Acclaimed as 1967's reading headliner by critics everywhere! Reserve your copy now!

Haunted victim . . . innocent prey . . . or
deadly killer? What was the fearsome
secret my white-faced
girl was hiding from the world?

ONE is COMPANY . . .

by JOHN A. ELBERT

THIS STORY is true. In the journals of abnormal psychology there are many case histories of dual- and multi-personality, some real, some spurious, but none with so unusual an ending as this, I venture to say.

I am Arthur Strong and am a practicing psychoanalyst with offices in the Johnson Building in the heart of the city. In these days of stress and disillusionment, I am a very busy man, but never too busy to give my time to an old friend, especially to an old friend such as Helen Albertson.

Helen and I had known and liked one another since high school days and after her marriage five years ago, her husband, Bill, also became my friend. Although we only saw each other two or three times a month, we still felt a closeness that never waned.

I played the role of the bachelor friend of the family and all three of us enjoyed our meetings tremendously. So, between patients one Monday afternoon, when I received a call for help from Helen, naturally I could not refuse. I picked up the phone and said, "Doctor Strong speaking."

"Hello, Arthur. This is Helen Albertson."

"Hi, stranger. It's been all of two days. What's new?"

"Arthur, I want you to do something for me."

I could tell by her voice that she was serious, so I dropped the flippancy.

"Of course, Helen. You name it I'm your boy."

"I want you to meet me somewhere."

"You mean right now?"

"Yes, if you can. It's very important."

"Well," I said, "I do have another patient in half an hour, but I can have my secretary postpone it."

"Would you? I know how swamped you are, but—"

"Okay, Helen, I'll do it. Where do you want me to meet you?"

"On Thompson Street, between Duane and Jones, there's a bar called the Chatterbox. Could you be there, say, in forty-five minutes?"

"Sure, but what—"

"All right. See you then." And she hung up.

In the cab going downtown, I was stumped for an answer as to what might be troubling Helen. She had money, the best of friends, clothes and schools. Her husband was a rich and successful lawyer with strong possibilities for the governorship—an up-and-comer, as I believe they say in some circles.

And in addition to all this, she was beautiful. Her life seemed as free of tribulation as that of anyone I knew. Of course, as a psychoanalyst, I had long since learned that what appears on the surface is very seldom the truth.

Helen was standing on the sidewalk as my taxi came to a stop in front of the Chatterbox. I paid the driver and walked over to her.

"Greetings, Helen," I said. "If anyone saw us together in this neighborhood, you know what they'd think, don't you?"

Helen didn't smile. She said, "Arthur, we're going into this bar and have a drink. Don't show surprise or say anything about what may happen. Just watch and listen. I'll explain later. All right?"

"Of course, Helen. You're the boss. Lead on."

She turned and I followed her into the dimly lighted bar. It was typical of the cocktail lounge on the fringe of a big city that tries to look swank, but only manages to appear false, like a stage set in the light of day.

As we walked past the bartender, I was startled when he called out cheerfully, "Hi, Helen! How goes it?" His manner was that of an old friend.

Helen smiled and waved her hand to him as we sat down at a table opposite the bar. She threw me a furtive glance while I ordered two dry martinis from the waitress.

Turning to her, I said, "Helen, what—"

She stopped me by squeezing my arm and saying quickly, "Later!"

We sat there and sipped our martinis, Helen forcing a light conversation which I did my confused best to go along with until, after some minutes, the door opened and a tall redhead came into the bar. She waved gaily to Helen, saying, "Hi, Helen-honey." Giving me a

quick professional once-over, she took a stool and began chatting with the bartender.

I looked at Helen, but she avoided my eyes. I ordered two more cocktails and resigned myself to waiting for an explanation. The waitress was just serving our drinks when the door again opened and I sensed Helen's body stiffen. I turned toward the new arrival and saw a big man with sleek, black hair who bore all the signs in dress and manner of a bookmaker, or some other Hollywood-type racketeer.

He was almost to our table when he spotted Helen. At first a smile started on his face, but then, as though he remembered something, it disappeared.

I almost choked on my martini when I heard Helen's voice calling to the man, "Hello, there. How are you?"

He stopped by the table, hesitated for a moment, then grinned broadly.

"Hello, yourself. I didn't know whether we were on speaking terms any more, or not."

"I'm sorry about yesterday," Helen said. "Won't you sit down and have a drink with us?"

By the tenseness of her voice, I could tell that Helen was acting and that it wasn't coming to her easily.

The man sat down and said, "Only if I'm buying. Around here, Babe does all the buying. You should know that." His grin took on the aspect of a leer.

Helen's smile was as rigid as that of a department store mannequin. "That's right—Babe." She turned to me. "Tom, I'd like you to meet Babe." To Babe, she said, "Tom's an old friend."

Babe thrust a fistful of sausages at me and I attempted to wrap my hand around them but failed by inches.

"Hello, Tom," he said, "glad to meet you. Any friend of Helen is a friend of mine."

"Likewise," I said, surprised at the expression coming from my mouth.

Glancing at our drinks, Babe said, "You folks having the same?" We nodded and he called to the waitress, "Two martinis and a Scotch and water."

"I—I want to apologize for the way I acted yesterday," Helen said. "I guess I was just in a bad mood."

"That's okay, Doll. We all got our ups and downs. Even me," he added modestly. "But anytime you got troubles, just tell 'em to Babe, that's all."

"Thank you, Babe. I'll remember that."

There was a rather uncomfortable silence for awhile until the waitress brought our drinks, then, frowning, Babe said, "You know what, Doll, there's something been bothering me. Ever since I saw you on the street yesterday.

You're not the same. You're not like you was the night we had a real ball in here." He laughed. "Man, that was some ball, wasn't it?"

Helen managed a laugh. "Yes, it—it sure was." The word *sure* coming from Helen was as unlikely as Emily Post eating caviar with her fingers.

The next several minutes were taken up with Babe's recounting the details of the 'ball' they'd had and his assurance of what a big man he was in the neighborhood and if we ever needed any help the man to see was Babe; he could fix anything. As Helen finished the last half of her martini in one swallow, her shaking hand told me of the control she was exerting to keep from cracking.

I ostentatiously looked at my wrist watch and Helen, catching the hint, rose and said, "Well, Babe, it's been nice, but I believe we must be going. Tom has an important business engagement uptown."

"Aw, come on, Helen. You don't have to go. It's still practically morning for me. Let Tom go take care of his business and you stick around with me. He can come back—if he wants to," he ended, clearly implying that he'd be a much happier man if I were to be run over by a taxi or something. "We'll have a ball!"

"I'm afraid I really can't, Babe. But some other time soon." Helen was edging toward the door, so I quickly allowed my hand to be mangled for the second time and hurried after her.

"Okay, that's a date, Doll," we heard Babe shout as the door closed behind us.

"What in the devil is going on, Helen?" I sounded like a madman who has been let out too soon.

"There's a luncheonette right down the street," Helen said. "We can talk there and I need a cup of coffee."

Seated in a back booth with hot coffee in front of us, I said, "Now, for heaven's sake, Helen, tell me before I become one of my own patients!"

"Actually, it's quite simple, Arthur, but at the same time completely incomprehensible." She sipped her coffee. "There's a marvelous fabric house near here," she went on, "and since I've been considering re-doing the house, I came down yesterday to see if I could get some ideas. Afterwards, just for the exercise, I started walking up Thompson Street. As I was passing the Chatterbox, this man, Babe, came out and said, 'Helen, Doll, where you been keeping yourself?' " She continued with a look of utter incredulity on her face.

"He acted as though—as though he'd known me for ages. As though I were—an intimate friend of his. I was absolutely dumfounded. If he hadn't used my first name

and hadn't been so familiar, I would've considered it nothing more than an attempted pick-up, but. . . . Well, anyway, I said, 'I'm sorry, but you must be mistaken. I'm afraid we've never met,' and kept right on walking. He stared after me for a bit, then shrugged his shoulders and went in the other direction.

"That probably would have been the end of it if my curiosity hadn't led me back to that bar."

She stopped for a moment. "Now, here's the incredible part. I went into the bar and the bartender smiled at me and said, 'Well, if it isn't Helen Albertson! Been on the wagon, Helen?' I pretended to know him and told him, yes, I had been on the wagon. He said, 'Well, glad to see you back. The first one's on me,' and gave me a martini.

"Do you see, Arthur? He knew my first and my last name! After awhile, that same redhead who was there today came in and sat down next to me and started gossiping away as though I were her best friend in the world! I finished my martini and got out as fast as I could. I thought I was going mad!" She stopped.

I said, "Is that all?"

"Is that all? Isn't that enough? That's why I had to take you in there with me. I've got to find an explanation."

My mind was a total blank. I guess it showed.

"Could it possibly be coincidence, Arthur?" she said.

"If it is, it's certainly the most astounding coincidence I ever heard of."

We were both silent for a moment and then I said, "Look, Helen, let me give this some thought. I'll think of something to do. I must get back to my office."

"All right, Arthur," Helen said in a helpless voice, "but do think of something. I can't bear this not knowing."

I dropped her off at her home and went on to my office. That's where we left it for the time being.

About three days later, Helen's problem having flitted in and out of my busy mind like a bird through a tree, I was sitting at my desk listening to the playback of a tape recorded session of one of my patients, when my secretary came in.

"Mrs. Albertson is here to see you, Doctor Strong," she said. "She says it's very important and seems quite upset."

I frowned and felt guilty because of the little thought I had given to Helen's need. "All right, Miss Oliver, tell her to come in."

Helen walked quickly into the office and I was shocked by her appearance. She was wearing no make-up and her face looked bloodless.

"Hello, Helen. Sit down," I said.

As she took the chair across from me, she laid a package on my desk. "Hello, Arthur," she said in a toneless voice.

"I'm sorry I haven't gotten in touch with you," I said. "Afraid my only excuse is work."

"That's all right, Arthur. I understand."

"Is there anything new about—I mean, what's happened? You look dreadful."

With the trace of a smile she said, "Thank you."

"I mean—" I started to apologize.

"Never mind." She paused for a moment, then opened the package and drew out some clothing; a skirt, a blouse, a sweater, a black beret and a pair of high-heeled shoes.

"What's this?" I asked rather stupidly.

"Arthur, I found these things in my bedroom closet the day before yesterday. Look at them closely."

I picked up the skirt and blouse and examined them. They merely looked like women's clothing to me. I shrugged, "I don't see—"

She stared at me intently. "Can you imagine me wearing anything like this?"

"Well, no, now that you mention it. They do appear rather cheap."

"They are. They come from a department store called Varnaby's, one of those bargain basement places where truck driver's wives pull each other's hair out over a twelve-ninety-five dress. The sort of place I've heard about but have never set foot in!"

"So, then, how—"

"Exactly; how or *who?*" She paused, as though waiting for this to pierce my thick skull. "But that isn't all. I got this in the mail this morning," she said, taking a paper from her bag and handing it to me. "It's a bill for this clothing from Varnaby's."

I looked at her questioningly.

"I went straight to Varnaby's and talked to the manager. He took me to the clerk who made the sale. The clerk swore, without any hesitation, that I was the one she had waited on, the one who had bought these clothes. I didn't argue. I paid for them and the manager gave me this."

She handed me another slip of paper. "This is the purchase order with my signature on it. Only it can't possibly be!"

I studied the handwriting at the bottom of the slip. It was very precise; the handwriting, from what little I knew on the subject, of a

secure and untroubled person. I said, "Have you a sample of your signature with you, Helen?"

"Yes, my driver's license." She began to rummage through her bag and then stopped and frowned. "I seem to have lost or misplaced my wallet."

"When did you have it last?"

"I don't know. I seldom use cash. I pay all my bills by check. It's been days since I've seen it."

"Well, it'll probably turn up. Here," I said, pushing a notepad and pen across to her, "write a sentence or two and then sign your name."

She bent over the desk for a moment. "There," she said and slid the pad back to me.

I placed it next to the other paper and compared signatures. They appeared to be almost identical, "They look the same to me," I told Helen, "but I'm no handwriting expert. I have a friend, though, who is and I'm going to take these to him and see what he has to say." I put both papers into my billfold.

A long moment passed before Helen spoke. "Arthur, do you—do you think someone may be impersonating me?"

"I really don't know what to think, Helen. Right now I'm merely confused. I can't for the life of me see what anyone would have to gain."

After another thoughtful silence, Helen said quietly, "Arthur, I've read a little psychiatry and I've come across examples of what is called dual-personality. I saw an old film recently titled *The Three Faces of Eve,* allegedly a true story. Is it possible that this could be happening to me?"

"Of course it's possible, Helen, but—well, first we'll have to go deeper into this." I paused. "Tell me, have you ever experienced blackouts? That is, periods of time when you don't remember where you've been or what you've done?"

She looked down at her hands in her lap and said softly, "Yes, I have."

I was startled. I had expected the answer to be no. I was speechless for a moment, then asked, "When?"

"Several times. I get these terrible headaches where all I can do is take some aspirin and then lie down until it goes away. Then—then I've often been surprised at the amount of time that's passed. I mean, it seems like I've only been in bed for an hour or so, but sometimes five, six or more hours have gone by."

"Does this ever happen at night?" I was thinking of the Chatterbox and the ball that Babe claimed to have had with Helen.

"Yes, sometimes. After dinner, I've gotten a bad headache, then laid down and the next thing I knew it was morning."

I thought about this, then said, "Would it be possible for you to

get out of the house at night without Bill knowing it?"

"Yes, easily. We have separate rooms connected by a bath. Once Bill has gone to sleep, only an explosion could wake him."

I swung my chair around and looked out of the window. I was truly shaken by all this. It was fantastic, unbelievable! Granted I did not see a lot of Helen, but as a psychiatrist I should have spotted some sign, some indication, and I had seen nothing.

Turning back to her, I said, "Listen, Helen, don't let this worry you too much for the present. Let's wait and see if that signature is a forgery. If it is, then we'll know that somebody for unknown reasons is up to something and, believe me, we'll find out who it is. If it's not a forgery—"

"Yes?"

"Well, let's just wait until we know for certain. All right?"

"All right, Arthur." Helen rose and gave me her hand.

"Please take it easy, Helen. I'll call you tomorrow."

"I'll try to. Good-by." She turned and walked out of the office, her perfectly tailored figure erect and moving with its usual grace.

I sat down and stared at the closed door.

BILL ALBERTSON was a tall, handsome man with a tanned face and close-cropped, metallic gray hair. His eyes were a hard blue until he smiled, then they shone with a warmth that gave you the feeling a god had placed his benediction upon you. He possessed that atmosphere which has been inadequately labelled 'personal magnetism.'

In answer to my ring, Bill opened the door himself and greeted me morosely. "Hello, Arthur. Come in."

I followed him down the hall through heavy doors into what was a combination library and study; small but beautifully furnished. Bill crossed to the bar and said, "The usual?"

I nodded and sat down in a leather chair facing the fireplace. Bill handed me a scotch on the rocks and seated himself in a chair at the other end of a glass coffee table. There was a silence as we tasted our drinks.

"It's damned hard to know where to begin, Arthur," Bill said, frowning.

"Try, you know where," I said.

Bill had called me earlier that day and said there was something important that he wanted to talk about and as soon as I could get free of the office I came directly to his home.

"Well, it's about Helen." He relaxed slightly, as though the first barrier had been surmounted by the mention of his wife's name. "She hasn't really been herself for some time and I've become wor-

ried. I had to talk to someone, and who else better than you?"

Pretending complete ignorance, I said, "What is it, Bill? Is she sick?"

"I'm not sure what it is. It's all so—so elusive. The only physical symptom is these headaches she's been having. They're very painful and she's forced to take aspirin and go to bed."

"Any other indications of illness?"

"No, only that—" He paused, searching for the correct words. "Only that she's become a completely different person from the woman she used to be. You know how bright and gay she's always been. Laughing easily, singing to herself around the house."

"Yes, that's certainly Helen."

"That was Helen. With the exception of an occasional forced attempt, I haven't seen her smile in lord knows how long."

I sipped my drink while trying to decide just what and how much I should tell Bill.

"When did you first notice this?" I asked.

"It's hard to remember, Arthur. Well over a month, I'd say."

"She seemed quite cheerful the last time I was here for dinner, and that's hardly a month ago."

"Yes, that's true. I recall being very happily surprised that evening." He smiled that unique smile of his and said, "Must be your schoolboy charm, Arthur. Helen always does look forward to your evenings with us. As do I, may I hastily add."

I acknowledged this small compliment with a nod and held out my empty glass to him.

He jumped to his feet, saying, "Oh, sorry. Didn't notice your tank was empty." Taking my glass, he went to the bar.

I rose from my chair and stood facing the bookshelves, not looking at the titles, but trying to think and decide.

"Excuse me a second, Arthur," Bill said from behind me. "The ice has all melted. I'll get more from the kitchen." He left the room.

What was I going to say to him? That there was a good chance his wife was mentally ill? That it seemed to be progressive and she would probably need institutional treatment. I simply could not do it. Not right then. I decided I would wait for at least a short while to see what might happen. The moment

the decision was made, I felt better.

I began to study the book titles in front of me. Bill owned a small but fine collection: The complete works of Thomas Mann in black calfskin with gold lettering, most of the English classics, all equally well-bound. The shelf below contained a miscellaney: Rossolin on chess, Carlton's *Great Battles of the Civil War,* a book on bridge, a book on . . .

My eyes stopped. For a second, I didn't know what circuit in my brain had closed and arrested my eyes on one particular book, but then it came to me. The title of the book was *Barzun on Forgers and Forgery.* I shook my head to clear an ugly thought from it. No, I told myself, don't be ridiculous. It's impossible!

Just then Bill returned with the ice.

"Here we go," he said as he entered. While making our drinks, he noticed my absorption with his books and said, "What the devil are you doing, Arthur? Trying to memorize my library? You've been here often enough to be able to put your finger on any one of them blindfolded.

I removed the book on forgery from the shelf and turned. "Yes, but it seems you have a new one. Don't tell me that things are so bad you've taken up forgery?"

Moving over to me with our drinks, he said, "What's that?" He gave me my drink and I handed him the book. "Never saw this before. It must be Helen's, although I don't understand how forgery could be of any interest to her."

He replaced the book on the shelf. "I'll have to ask her when she gets home."

We both returned to our chairs and sipped our drinks. Bill offered me a cigarette from his case and we smoked for awhile in silence. I couldn't get over my astonishment at finding that book.

Finally, I said, "Listen, Bill, why don't we go at this professionally? Why don't you get Helen to make an appointment with me and I'll have a talk with her, both as friend and psychiatrist?"

Bill nodded. "Yes, you're probably right. That would be the best thing."

We rose and Bill walked me to the front door. Just before I left, he said, "There's something that you might go into with Helen, Arthur. As you know, we've been married five years and have no children. Several doctors have told us that Helen cannot conceive. I think this may be the cause of her trouble, or at least a contributing factor. What's your opinion?"

"It's possible, Bill. I'll try talking to her about it."

We shook hands and I left.

A FEW DAYS LATER, when I was on the point of calling Helen and asking her to come to my office, she appeared in the waiting room and

my secretary ushered her in. If possible, the woman looked even worse than she had on her previous visit.

"Hello, Helen," I greeted her gently. "Have a seat." She sat down and I went on. "I was just about to call you."

"I'm sorry to be such a nuisance, Arthur, but I've discovered something pretty awful and I had to come to you."

"Before you tell me, Helen, I have some news for you. I took that signature and the sample of your handwriting to my friend and he says that it is a very clever forgery."

I waited for some reaction from Helen and was nonplussed when she merely nodded, as though what I had said was of little importance and she had known it all along. "You see what that means, don't you? It means that someone is definitely impersonating you."

"Yes," Helen answered, "and I'm fairly certain I know who that someone is."

My eyebrows went up at this and a thought that had been nagging me ever since my talk with Bill came back into my mind too strongly to be denied.

"Helen," I said slowly, "there's a book on forgery in your library. Did you buy that book?"

I stared hard at her and she looked directly into my eyes and said simply, "No."

There was a silence while the full implications of this filled my mind.

Helen nodded agreement to my thoughts and said, "I have a tape recording here, Arthur. I'd like you to play it." She opened her bag and took out a tape and an envelope. She handed me the tape.

While I threaded it on my recorder, Helen said, "I found that in Bill's desk. The voices you'll hear are mine and Bill's."

I started the machine and sat down to listen.

Bill's voice came on and said, "I've really been worried, Helen. This kind of mental illness is frightening. Usually it's progressive and absolutely nothing can be done."

"I know," Helen answered. "Probably the only solution is a private sanitarium."

"Yes, but—" Bill hesitated. "Once the stamp of insanity is placed on someone, it's damned hard to remove, even if he's completely cured."

"But if that person could be dangerous, either to herself or to others, you'd be taking an awful responsibility to allow her to remain free."

There was a pause, then Bill said intensely, "Only think of the responsibility of being the one to commit another human being! A mental institution can be a living hell for some people. The treatment might be worse than the disease. If you, Helen, were to spend

time in a sanitarium, as sensitive as you are, when you got out you would be an entirely different person."

"That's a chance that has to be taken, Bill. Nobody can predict the future. You can only go on what you know right now."

Bill sighed audibly. "I suppose I have to agree." There was the sound of a chair sliding back. "Well, we needn't decide right this minute. Why don't we eat out tonight? It will make a nice change."

"That sounds wonderful, Bill," Helen said, her voice diminishing as she moved away from the microphone. Then the tape was dead.

I turned off the machine and looked at Helen with a perplexed and questioning expression. "I thought that Bill knew nothing of what's been troubling you, aside from your headaches."

"He does and he doesn't," Helen answered. She paused and then said, "Arthur, in that dialogue you just heard, we were not talking about me, but about the wife of one of Bill's clients. I remember that conversation perfectly well, only I didn't know the recorder was turned on. That tape has been carefully edited to make it sound as though we were talking about me."

"But why on earth—" I almost shouted, as I rose to my feet and leaned forward on the desk toward Helen.

She went on calmly, "After hearing that recording, a horrible suspicion that I had felt for some time began to look more like the truth. I took Bill's desk key from his pocket while he was showering and went through his papers. I found this." She handed me the envelope she'd been holding.

I opened it and removed three or four sheets of what appeared to be printed legal forms. It didn't take me long to see that they were commitment papers to the state mental hospital and that Helen's name had been typed onto the first line.

I didn't read any further, but abruptly sat down filled with an immense feeling of being lost. Bill Albertson attempting to commit his wife to an insane asylum?

"Why, Helen? Why?" I managed to ask. "You and Bill have been very happy together for five years!"

"Not really, Arthur. For some time now we've been unhappy. Bill hasn't so much as kissed me for over a year. We always put on an act for you because we didn't want to thrust our misery upon an old and good friend."

"Tell me about it, Helen, if you want to."

"Well, the main reason is that we've had no children. We both wanted them very much, but Bill's need became almost an obsession, so much so that when our doctor told him he could never be a father, he refused to believe it and is cer-

tain that I am the one who is lacking in some way."

"But, good heavens, a man doesn't shove his wife into an asylum just because she can't give him children!"

"No, not unless he is not sane. But there's more to it than this. Do you know who Betty James is, by any chance?"

I shook my head no.

"She's Bill's secretary. He has been in love with her for over a year."

It took me a moment to digest this new information and when I had, Helen continued: "I told him that I would give him a divorce, but he swore there was no reason, that it was a passing infatuation. I now realize that he refused because a divorce could be very harmful to his political career, especially if there were any scandal involved."

She took a deep breath and went on. "After I'd found the tape and those papers, I went to Bill's office for the first time in many months. I barely got inside the door when the entire truth hit me so hard I almost fainted.

"It had been so long since I'd seen Betty James that I'd completely forgotten the amazing resemblance we have to one another. We're the same age, coloring and build. Her hair is lighter than mine, but with a rinse and the right make-up she could pass for me anywhere I wasn't well known and whoever saw her could easily swear that it had been me."

She looked hard at me for a moment, then asked, "Are you beginning to see the whole picture, Arthur? Insanity is grounds for divorce in this state. A highly publicized divorce scandal could irrevocably ruin Bill's career, but nobody would feel anything but sympathy for a man whose beloved wife had gone insane, and would not blame him for divorcing her. Also, there would be no negative publicity for that sort of bad luck."

She stopped and we both sat back thinking deeply.

I was almost convinced of the incredible, but still felt a slight nagging doubt.

"What about your headaches and blackouts, Helen?" I asked.

"I'm certain that I was being drugged. I'm equally certain that Bill's next step would be for you to talk to me. He knows that I would tell you everything and soon both you and I would be convinced that I was mentally ill. What could be better for his purpose than to have your signature on the commitment papers? A leading analyst and an old friend of the family?"

I nodded. It all held together. I suddenly felt a terrible depression come over me.

That this could be happening to two of the finest people I had ever known!

"What do we do now?" I asked.

"This sounds to me like a job for the police."

"I don't think so, Arthur. I don't see what they could do. What I want is to get absolute proof of Bill's relations with Betty James. Then I'll sue for divorce and splash everything in the newspapers. That will be my revenge."

"What can I do for you, Helen?"

"Nothing, really. I just wanted you to know all this in case it becomes important later. I'll have no difficulty getting the proof I need." She rose. "Keep the tape and those papers for me, will you? We may need them. I'll call you soon, Arthur."

She took my hand in a firm, warm grip, said good-by and walked out of the office.

Helen did call me, only sooner than she'd intended. That night, as I was preparing for bed, she called to tell me that she had just killed her husband.

I GOT TO Helen's house as quickly as I could. She opened the door wide and stood there, her face as white as the walls of the hallway, her eyes staring.

"The kitchen," she said, and moved aside to let me pass.

At the end of the hall, I pushed open the swinging door and entered the kitchen. A chair had been knocked over, some cups and saucers and a bottle of scotch had crashed to the floor from the table. The room was filled with a sickening smell of whiskey.

Bill Albertson lay on his side in a broad, red stain and the handle of a steak knife protruded from his chest. It needed only a glance to tell me that the blade had entered his heart and there was nothing any man could do to help him.

I turned back and saw Helen standing in the doorway with an expression of awed fascination on her face. Quickly I moved and, taking her arm, led her back to the living room. At the bar, I poured two glasses half full of bourbon and handed one to Helen.

"Drink this," I ordered.

The bourbon was harsh going down but did its work swiftly. "Tell me what happened," I said.

Helen gagged briefly on the whiskey, then said, "I came home tonight and found Bill very drunk. He was sullen and mean and suddenly he told me that he'd discovered the tape recording was missing and he wanted it. I told him that he wasn't going to get it and that I knew everything and was going to sue for divorce and ruin his political career. We screamed at each other and then—then he seemed to lose his mind and he grabbed me by the throat."

She rubbed her throat in memory. "I—I snatched a knife from the table and stabbed him. Then I don't remember anything until you rang the doorbell." She sat down on the sofa, allowing the glass of

whiskey to fall, and covered her face with her hands.

I watched her for a moment, feeling sucked dry of emotion, then slowly walked to the phone and called the police.

After the coroner's inquest, Helen invited me to her house for coffee. The proceedings had been very efficient and were quickly over and the verdict had been justifiable homicide. The handwriting expert's evidence, the obvious resemblance between Betty James and Helen, the tape and commitment papers and, primarily, my testimony had convinced the jury that Helen was telling the truth and that there should be no indictment.

We went into Helen's living room and she rang for the maid and ordered coffee. She sat down and leaned back with a deep sigh of relaxing tension. I sat beside her as she said, taking my hand in hers, "It's all over, Arthur. It's all over."

I said, "Is it, Helen? It's not for me. I don't think it ever shall be for me."

She leaned toward me with sympathy in her voice and eyes. "Poor, dear Arthur. I've put you through hell, haven't I?"

I placed my hand over hers and said, "It's you who has been through hell. I don't know how you took it."

And at that moment a strange idea came to me. Could I have been in love with Helen all these years and not known it? Would that explain why I had never felt a strong attraction to any other woman and had remained a bachelor? I didn't know for certain, but I did know that the emotion I was experiencing then was near to what I thought love must be.

Our faces were very close and I recalled the many movies I'd seen where a man and woman are irresistably compelled to kiss. I stood up and moved across the room.

As I turned back to Helen, she had a smile on her face that told me she knew exactly what I had been thinking. At that moment the doorbell rang.

"Sit still," I said. "I'll get it." Helen followed me into the hall as I went to the front door and opened it. There was a boy of about fifteen or sixteen standing on the porch.

"Is this where Mrs. Helen Albertson lives?" he asked.

I said, "Yes, it is. Can I help you?"

He grinned and said, "No, but I can help her. She must've lost her wallet, 'cause it was found under the counter when they cleaned the store last night." He held out a leather wallet to me.

"Where are you from?" I asked curiously.

"Varnaby's," he answered.

"But—" I started to say, remembering that Helen had emphatically sworn that she had never so

much as set foot in Varnaby's.

I stared at the boy, my eyes slowly opening wider with growing awareness, then I turned and looked at Helen. She stood, her back straight with hands at her sides, her eyes unblinking, and a small smile of triumph was on her lips.

Helen nodded her head slowly to me. "Yes, Arthur, I did it. I did it all by myself. He wouldn't give me a divorce and, you see, I have no money of my own." Suddenly her face and voice were pure hatred. "He thought he could just go on and on with that secretary of his! He knew that if he was careful I could never get grounds to divorce him and hurt his precious name!"

The boy said. "Well, I guess I better be getting back to the store." He hurried away without looking back and I closed the door.

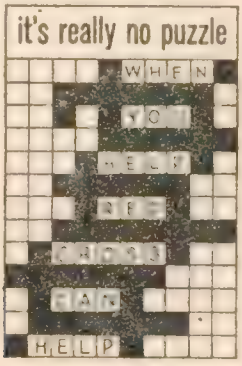
"But—but how?" I stammered. "All those—those things! The forged signature, the—"

Helen's smile broadened. "Anyone who takes the trouble to learn how can easily make his own signature look like a forgery. As for the rest, that was easy. All it took was a little imagination."

It finally dawned on me that the only truth Helen had told me was that Bill had in fact been in love with his secretary—and Helen's jealousy had been deadly.

"Please, Arthur, let's forget all about it," she said, moving toward me with her hands out beckoningly. "It's all past. We need not ever mention it again."

My body turned cold and I could feel myself begin to tremble. I put up a shaking hand, palm toward her, as though to ward off some malignant monster, then spun around and ran from the house, slamming the door behind me.



A New MIKE SHAYNE Caper Next Month

You May Have Missed
These Three MIKE SHAYNE Stories

3 BACK COPIES FOR ONLY $1

If you've just discovered MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE you may not have read any of the previously published issues. And if you are a real dyed-in-the-wool Shayne fan—and who isn't?—you'll want to read them. We have a very limited supply left of some of these back copies and they are yours—by filling out the conveniently printed coupon. Each issue also contains—besides a new Mike Shayne adventure—short stories, novelets and short novels by prominent writers in the mystery, crime and detective story field.

No. 1 . . . A SALESMAN DIES by Brett Halliday (July 1965)
A hair-spin curve on Death's highway can rob a traveling salesman of his customers. But Shayne knew that murder could involve far more than just a loss of customers.

No. 2 . . . THE MOVING TARGET by Brett Halliday (August 1965)
The precious life of Shayne's client had been in jeopardy so many times, the case had a "cry wolf" aspect. But Mike Shayne knew that a killer didn't have to look like a wolf.

No. 3 . . . FOR LOVE OR MURDER by Brett Halliday (September 1965)
Here's a novel-length case in which suspects are as numerous as autumn leaves, and the murder trail has a way of doubling back in a forest of no return—for one less apt than Shayne.

RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
56 WEST 45th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036

Please send me the three back copies of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE. I enclose $1.00 in full payment. Remit by check, money order, or cash.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY, ZONE, STATE .....

Please print **June—1967**

Featuring

KEVIN KAR

THE BRAIN PICKERS

She was lush and lovely, just about everything a man could want in a woman. There was only one small thing wrong with her. She wanted me, ardently desired me—dead!

by MAX VAN DERVEER

THE DEEPLY TANNED vision on my threshhold said, "Mr. Kevin Kar?"

For her I would be anyone. I confessed, "It's I, hon—or is it, it's me?"

"I don't know, Apollo. You're supposed to be the hotshot writer, or something."

She looked very soft and cushiony. Very appetizing. And she had very large, green-tinted eyes.

"Rooty-tooty spy stuff?" she went on with lifted brow. "Jazzy secret agents, jazzy secret girls, jazzy secret joints and all that jazz?"

"Un-huh," I admitted. So she had a line on me. My inventory became more critical. "My publisher likes jazzy stuff."

She opened a pear-shaped purse. She put her left hand inside the purse. The hand came out. And I said, "Ahhh."

She said, "Recognize?"

"Among the things I am not, doll, I am not blind. But be careful, huh? That thing could go bang."

"Right, Apollo. Yes, sir, it sure could. Right in your belly button."

She was blonde. She was big. She was built. She also now held a nasty-looking, snub-snouted gun in her left hand. The snub snout was pointed straight at my navel. It was a beautiful mid-November afternoon. Brilliant sunshine. Breeze

wafting. Tumbleweed tumbling. A beautiful day in the Texas Panhandle. Certainly not a day for dying. But there she was on my doorstep.

I pretended indifference to the gun. "Ma'am, could I interest you in a—"

"Back, Jack."

I backed.

She came off my threshold. She came inside. She closed the door, put her shoulder blades against it. She had good legs. But, alas, she also held the gun as if she was used to it. Now she wiggled the gun.

"Sit, Mr. Kar."

"Request, hon? In the Panhandle a man dies with his boots on. It's tradition. May I?"

The green eyes flicked to my stockinged feet. "You may not. Sit."

I sat. In the special, deep winged-chair. And then I measured her carefully and took heart. She didn't act like she was going to kill me immediately. I figured I might have at least another full five minutes to live. So I said, "Can't we get acquainted? I don't think I know you."

"That's right, Jack. You don't."

"You've got a name, I assume."

"Andrea."

"And a home?"

She shrugged. "An island."

"An island?"

"Some of us live in castles, Mr. Kar. Some of us don't."

"This is a duplex."

She nodded. "I know."

"There are people next door. Neighbors. They will hear loud noises."

She shook her head. "Not your neighbors, Mr. Kar. Your neighbors are not around when you are here. Your neighbors are around only when you are not here. Your neighbors are like—shall we say caretakers? When you are off on some wildly exciting adventure, you have neighbors. Only then. What it all boils down to, I think, is your neighbors keep an eye on the joint when you are gone. Uncle Sam wants it that way."

"Uncle Sam, huh?" I mused speculatively.

"You know," she said, cocking her pretty head slightly, "I've never killed a United States government secret agent before. I think it might be fun."

"Baby, I'm a writer," I pleaded. "Just a writer. Bedeviled—"

"Horse. You're not fooling anyone with that author front, Mr. Kar. At least, not today."

"Okay. So I'm an Indian. Kiowa. My mother—"

"Every girl should meet a real live Indian sometime in her life," she acknowledged.

"My mother reared me to be a gentle man," I went on doggedly. "My father—"

"Died in the South Pacific during World War II. He, too, was an agent. Or should I say, like father, like son? Anyway, I've read a com-

plete dossier on you, Mr. Kar. You are six feet, three inches tall. Most of the time you weigh in around two hundred and fifteen pounds. You have health, no wealth. You are a celibate and an occasional smoker. Sometimes you live here in Amarillo, Texas. Most of the time you do not. Most of the time you are on the move.

"Like last week, for instance. Last week you were on the move—in East Berlin. Last week you kidnaped a man and took him out of East Berlin. You brought that man to this country. You hid him. You are presently allowing someone else to pick his brain. Karl Wolfgang Utrecht I want, Mr. Kar. And you're going to tell me where I can find him."

I had a clue for Andrea whoever-she-was. She knew too much about me; she knew too much about what I'd been doing in recent weeks. She wasn't supposed to know anything. Nobody was. That Utrecht business had all been hush-hush. At least, it was supposed to have been hush-hush. But, obviously, there had been a very large leak somewhere.

It was puzzling. It was disconcerting. Worse, it was going to anger a man in Washington.

The man in Washington was going to explode. The man in Washington was going to lop off heads until he found the leak—which would be child's play compared to what he would do if Karl Wolfgang Utrecht happened to be plucked from where we'd stored him.

I had a second clue for the blonde Andrea whoever-she-was. She was an amateur. Nobody walks into my abode with gun in hand and walks out undented. Someone may stand on my doorstep someday and shoot me dead on the spot, but no one backs me inside. The person who does has had it. Andrea had had it.

I pressed the hidden button in the face of the chair arm. The button, in turn, triggered an electric impulse that snapped my front door against blonde Andrea's back.

The knob in the middle of her spine brought a sharp yelp from her as she stumbled forward into the room.

I shot out of the chair, banged her with both hands, sent her pitching into the divan opposite me. She flopped and flapped and yelped again, but it was too late. I used a heel to kick the chair leg behind me. The divan snapped up and into the wall and became locked. Its bottom suddenly gleamed at me. Its bottom is a long glass window.

I went down on my hands and knees and looked through the window. Andrea was flopping around inside the soundproofed wall cubicle like a fish out of water: all arms, legs and lace panties.

She had a lot of steam. She kicked frantically. She had even better legs than I first had acknowledged. Then she spotted me look-

ing in on her and she stopped flopping. I grinned. She snarled.

She brought the gun around until its snub nose was looking me square in the eyes, maybe six inches away, and she squeezed the trigger. She should not have. All the slug did was ricochet off the impregnable glass, dance around inside the cubicle and become lodged.

I saw Andrea come up on her elbows. Her eyes popped. Her mouth dropped open. She probably screamed, but I could not hear her. Then abruptly she went flat on her nose and beat the floor with fist and gun butt—and I saw the blood leaking from one of her classic hips.

Alas, medication was required.

I called a close-mouthed cop, a detective who was the only cop in the city who knew me for what I really was. I told him what I needed. He came to the duplex. He looked in on Andrea. She still held the gun, but she had lost her steam. He saw her tears. He saw the flash of fear on her face, the plea in her eyes. He looked at the blood, looked at her legs. He waited.

She finally got the message. She released the gun in her fist and pushed it out of reach. Only then did my cop friend say anything. He grunted. "I swear, Kevin-boy, you-all come up with some of the cutest playmates."

"Amateur."

"She looks it."

"Scared now."

"I can see that much, too, pal."

"For the moment, I need her on ice."

He sighed. "Looking at her, I can think of more appropriate places, but ice it'll be."

"Your doctor friend?"

"Where else?"

"Then a private room."

"So private not even the termites get in. You-all know that."

"She's an accidental gunshot wound to your doctor friend."

"Natch."

"You'll be taken care of. There'll be a tax refund this year."

"Expected."

"Take her, please."

He took her. We dug her out of the wall cubicle and he lugged her out of my place as if he was carrying a bride.

"Why," he muttered, "do I always get to carry 'em out, but never in?"

"A man's destiny?" I grinned after him.

I went into my bedroom and closed the door. The room was now soundproofed. I unscrewed the left knob from the middle drawer of the dresser. Then I stared expectantly at the mirrored reflection of myself. The voice acknowledgment of my signal came from the mirror. Washington's most secreted bureau was on the line. I got Holly, my chief, and gave him all I knew.

His reaction was what I expected. He raised his voice. For him that was exploding. Then he said, "Okay, you're the decoy.

Move. Toronto, then to Vancouver down to Frisco, and on to Honolulu. Make contact from there. Maybe we'll know something by then. How do we find this Andrea?"

I told him.

"Shag it, boy. Someone else could be moving in immediately. Seeing Andrea carried out isn't going to fill their hearts with joy, you know."

"Holly, is there someone new on the scene?"

"I don't know." The words were snapped.

"I'm sure she isn't Peking or Moscow."

"Let us determine that, boy."

"I'm rolling."

I ROLLED. I dressed, packed, sneaked a look out a front window, saw an empty, quiet, sunlit street and hit the kitchen where I touched the special spot on the side of the refrigerator.

The refrigerator silently lifted a few inches from the floor and turned in a half circle.

I opened the door on its back to the cache of weapons. I took out the tear gas ring and the conventional gun, the cigarette package transmitter and receiver, the lapel Kiwanis button with its content of lethal poison and finally the special gun which would roast almost anything in a mushroom of fire.

Someone knocked on my front door.

This time I was ready when I opened the door. The person outside was dead if he or she so much as breathed deep.

Doctor Moria Parma breathed deep, all right, but she didn't die. She sucked a long, shuddering breath. She stood there on my doorstep, brown eyes wide, and swelled a trim figure that was as incongruous to a lady of science as mix to sipping whisky. Then she let all of the air out in a single expulsion while a shiver rattled her petite frame.

"Oh, Lordy, Mr. Kar," she breathed. "Thank God, you're here! I think someone is trying to kidnap me!"

A cab had brought her to me. The cab was leaving. It disappeared down the street. Now there was a second cab. It stopped in front of the house. A girl got out. She came

up the walk. She was tall, she was slim, she was smiling, she was walking easy, almost indolently.

"Hiyuh, Kevin-doll," she said.

She was a friend. She was a cohort. She was compatible. She had been with the Bureau about five years. We had worked together on two occasions. Her name was Elizabeth Stone. She was a good agent.

But Doctor Moria Parma dodged behind me when she saw Liz Stone. She dodged and clasped and hissed. "That's her! That's the girl who tried to kidnap me! Oh, Mr. Kar, watch out!"

With Liz Stone the only thing I'd watch out for was her affront. She was as subtle as a rock against the skull, especially in the presence of other women. In the presence of other women, Liz Stone could cut like a cat-o'-nine-tails.

Now she was close and there was laughter in her blue-gray eyes and a smile on her red lips.

"Kevin-doll," she purred, "it's been a long time."

She reached out and patted my cheek. I felt the bite as something from the ring on her finger penetrated my skin. I yelped. She laughed. And then I knew I was going down. I knew unconsciousness was sweeping up inside me.

The last thing I remembered was a vague image of Liz Stone turning on Doctor Moria Parma. The last thing I heard was Liz Stone purring, "You, too, darling."

And then there was a sharp sound, flesh against flesh. I had the impression Liz Stone wasn't acting like a friend. Liz Stone was acting like an enemy. What the hell had happened to Liz Stone? Where had she turned sour? And then I had nothing. Everything dissolved.

I came awake with the vague notion that I had been drunk and nonexistent for a month. Everything whirled. It was as if I was in a spin-washer and someone had forgotten to turn on the water. I seemed to tumble and spill and bounce around and yet there was no sensation of pain.

I opened my eyes.

There was light. There was sunshine. There was a pink ceiling. I took a chance and craned my neck. I was clothed. I was not bound. I was on a soft bed. There were four pink walls, a door in one, a huge window in another. I looked to my right. There was another bed. Doctor Parma lay on it, clothed, flat on her back, unmoving, her eyes opened wide and unblinking. She looked very quiet and pretty. But my heartbeat also kicked up a notch. Was she dead?

I left my bed gingerly, tested my legs. I could stand. I went to Doctor Parma, jackknifed over her. She was breathing. I touched her shoulder. The brown eyes rolled to me, remained wide, the lids immobile.

"You okay?" I asked.

She said nothing, didn't move.

"Hey?"

Nothing.

I put a stiff finger against her stomach and pushed. It was as if I was poking the finger into a mass of soft putty.

"Blink," I said.

She blinked. Once.

"Sit up."

She sat up.

"Look at me."

She turned her head.

"Kiss me."

She pursed her lips.

It was like kissing a mummy.

And then suddenly she was a flurry of action and sound. Her lips softened, her hands came up, her fingers dug deep into my neck muscles. She whimpered. Warmth and tiny sounds came from her. She was a woman, soft, pliable, frightened. The only trouble was, she did not remain that woman for more than a few seconds. She became Doctor Moria Parma again.

Suddenly she jerked back her head. She hissed indignation. Her hands banged against my shoulders, sent me rocking away from her.

Her eyes went very wide, her face registering incredulity, her lower jaw coming unhinged. "What do you—do you think you are doing?"

"Doll—"

Her eyes swept the bedroom.

"Where are we?" she went on as if I hadn't said a word. "What have you done to me? Oh, God, what have you done to me?" Her voice began to shrill. She leaned forward, lashed out with a hand.

I slapped her.

Her head snapped. Her cheek brightened. She sat rooted for a second. And then she crumbled. She folded into the bed and drew into herself and sobbed.

"Shock, Doctor Parma," I said flatly. "You've heard of it?"

She went on sobbing. I let her. I took in the bedroom again. It was a spacious room, deeply carpeted and expensively appointed. A very nice room, if one liked pink and/or being abducted. I was appreciative of neither. I could live with the former, but I had a hunch the latter might be dangerous—and I also had a suspicion we had been abducted, Doctor Parma and I.

I went to the single door. Naturally, the knob did not turn nor the door budge under my urging. I turned to the large window, sighed, searched myself. I had been relieved of all of my weapons. Natch again. I stopped at a dresser. There was a mirror.

I examined my cheek. There was a pinpoint of dried blood on my skin where Liz Stone had struck me, but more important, I seemed to have about a sixteen to eighteen hour fuzz of beard. I calculated. The sunshine outside had to be morning sunshine.

I went to the large window. It was not the Texas Panhandle I looked out upon. It was a rolling sea, beautiful in morning brilliance. Gray-green and expansive with its comb after comb of white caps

swelling and spilling toward the land, its emptiness spreading to the horizon. To certain artists, the scene probably would conjure strokes of genius. To me, it looked like a prison wall. It was vast, it was a void, and when I pressed my nose against glass and looked down three stories to jagged rocks bathed in foam I got the impression that someone did not expect Doctor Parma and I to escape by sea.

I turned back into the room. She had quieted but she continued to lay folded into herself. For the moment, I preferred the silence. I allowed my mind to work.

A couple of things clicked into place: A blonde Andrea on my doorstep. She had talked of an island and a castle. Okay, so this could be Andrea's island, Andrea's castle. She also had named Utrecht. She had wanted him. I scowled. Was Karl Wolfgang Utrecht also a prisoner? I did not like that thought.

Utrecht, an East German scientist who had been the prime mover in Red China's development of its nuclear warhead missile. Utrecht had been buoyant. Utrecht had expected fame. Utrecht had foreseen loot, medals, parades, reviewing stands, brass bands, the works. And Utrecht had gotten the works, okay. Utrecht had been given a polite thank you and a big thumb against the nose from Peking while the East Germans had been even slightly more graphic. The East Germans thought it better the world not know the deed of one of theirs.

They even had provided the sand pile for Utrecht to bury his head in. But that's where disillusionment had come to the fore. That's where a rejected Utrecht had become dejected and managed to sneak word beyond the iron curtain he was open to being defected.

Word like that spreads. Washington has big ears. Washington wants to know exactly what is going on in Red China. A bureau is alerted. A man is summoned. The man wings out of the Texas Panhandle to Washington and on to East Berlin. The man dodges and darts and digs for ten days and finally finds Karl Wolfgang Utrecht in his sandpile.

Utrecht is removed. Utrecht is whisked out from under the collective noses of the East Germans. Utrecht is brought to the U.S.A. Utrecht is plunked down in Amarillo, Texas, an unlikely place for a famed scientist to be stashed. Utrecht is given bread and bed in the Hotel Sanford, once a structure of magnificence on the High Plains, now just another ex-palace gasping for life against tax claims. Utrecht's brain is to be picked.

And the best little old cotton-picking brain picker currently in the business is a California female scientist named Dr. Moria Parma, who is summoned, sent, and is picking when, lo, kidnapers appear on the horizon.

MORIA PARMA sat up on the bed and smoothed her lap as I left the picture window. She seemed to have collected herself. She looked at me head-on.

"How are you feeling?" I asked.

"Terrible. For one thing, I have a splitting headache. For another, I feel as if I've slept in my clothing."

"You did. It's another day, Doc. The morning after, as they say."

She frowned on that and then she asked, "Where are we, Mr. Kar?"

I gave her some thoughts about a modern-day castle and an island. She chewed them and her lower lip simultaneously, then she went to the window and looked outside. Finally she said, "You and the girl who chased me to your home seemed to know each other." It was almost an accusation.

"Uh-huh," I mused. "And right there, Doc, something stinks."

"How?"

I explained. She worked on the lower lip again. "A member of your organization?" She sounded as if I had not made sense.

I shrugged. "I can't explain it. Not yet. Fill in the background for me, huh? Where and how did you run into Liz, or her into you? Where did she make her first move, tip you off she wasn't just after your autograph?"

"At the hotel this after—"

"Yesterday afternoon," I nodded. "Go on."

"I was in the lobby. I got on the elevator. I was going up to interview Doctor Utrecht again. This girl got on the elevator with me. She got off at the same floor. We were alone in the corridor. She opened a purse. I saw her take out a gun but before I could run or scream she had pressed the gun into my side. She told me I was to come with her."

"Did she call you by name?" I prodded.

"Yes. Before I saw the gun. It was the only reason I paid attention to her. I couldn't recall ever seeing her before. I didn't know how she could know my name. How did she?"

"Never mind for the moment. Did she mention Utrecht by name?"

Dr. Parma frowned. "No, I don't believe she did."

"Think, Doc. This could be important."

"All right. No, she did not say Doctor Utrecht's name."

"Or indicate she might even know Utrecht existed?"

"No. She did not."

"Then it's possible she didn't know where Utrecht was."

"I don't think she knew Doctor Utrecht was in a room just down the corridor, if that's what you mean."

"It's exactly what I mean, doll."

"Mr. Kar, why does that excite you?"

"We've got a chance. These people don't have Utrecht. If they had Utrecht, they wouldn't have bothered with us."

"Well—" Moria Parma let the word hang while wheels spun inside her skull. She didn't look like she came up with any answers. She came away from the window, sat on the edge of the bed opposite me.

"Mr. Kar," she finally said, "about this Elizabeth Stone. How would Elizabeth Stone know me? Why would she accost me with a gun? If she's a member of your organization, why did she come to your place, make you unconscious, attack me, and then—"

On another occasion, I might have thought the tiny frown between her brows almost cute.

"I don't have the answer," I said truthfully.

"Well, there has to be a logical explanation."

"Do I smell a scientific mind at work?"

"There is an explanation for all things, Mr. Kar."

"Okay. So Liz Stone has gone over to the other side."

The tiny frown deepened.

"Money," I said wearily. "Haven't you heard? Money talks. For money, Liz Stone is no longer a friend. For money, Liz has become a foe."

"This other side," Moria Parma said. "Who is on the other side?"

"I don't know," I said truthfully. "If I did, it might answer a question or two."

"You don't have any ideas?"

"I have a sixth sense. It tells me this is not the work of Peking or Moscow."

"Why do you eliminate those two?"

"I know their people."

"All of their people?"

"Most."

"Then you really can't eliminate them. Not conclusively."

"In my business, Doc, you live on sixth senses."

"Not in mine," she said emphatically.

"You're the expert in science. I'll be the expert in—"

"Let's not fight, Mr. Kar. Let's think about Elizabeth Stone and this Andrea person who confronted you. Can we assume they were working together?"

"We can."

"And can we assume they are not alone in this venture?"

"You can bet your largest atom on that much, Doc. This is the work of an organization."

"And this organization wants Doctor Utrecht?"

"Andrea wanted him. She said so."

"All right. Why do they want him?"

"Maybe to pick his brain like you have been doing, or maybe to kill him."

"Kill him!"

"Sometimes it's the way the game is played, doll."

She shuddered all over. Then she took a few seconds to regroup herself before she said, "I just don't understand how anyone even knew about Doctor Utrecht. I don't understand how they found us out, you, me, Amarillo, this entire thing. I thought it all was a very closely guarded secret in Washington. I thought—"

"It was supposed to be, Doc. On the other hand, five persons knew the secret—two in the Pentagon, my superior, you, me—and that opens at least five doors."

"Opens doors?"

"Someone spilled the beans."

"Not I, Mr. Kar."

"Nor I. Nor Holly."

"That leaves the Pentagon."

"The joint is not infallible."

Moria Parma shook her pretty head. "With so much at stake—"

"Honey, just how far had you gotten with Utrecht?" I interrupted. "Had you picked him clean?"

"Hardly, Mr. Kar. I've merely scratched the surface."

"So if we lose him now—"

"All of your cloak and dagger work is down the drain. Doctor Utrecht is the only man in the world who can tell us what we want to know. Other scientists in East Germany and Red China can tell us parts of the whole, but Doctor Utrecht is the only man who can give us the whole."

"Then I hope he's still alive."

"You—er, mentioned his death once before."

"Death he could get," I nodded somberly. "Fast. Utrecht could get dead without ever knowing what hit him."

"Mr. Kar—Kevin. All of a sudden I'm—I'm very frightened."

"Well, shake it, hon, because I've got a hunch you're going to have to answer questions intelligently. I've got a hunch you're going to have to lie intelligently."

"Lie?"

"We are the links to Utrecht, doll. We know where he is. I think we're going to be asked to pass on that information. I think it's the only reason we—you and I, Moria—are breathing at the moment. People are going to ask us to produce Utrecht for them. They're going to ask us to tell them just where the hell Utrecht is stashed. Unless you want him dead, you're going to lie. Understand?"

She became caught up in self pity. "How did I get involved?" she asked herself in a voice that was little more than a whisper.

"The point at the moment," I

said, looking out on the empty sea, "is how do we get uninvolved?"

THE NOISE WAS sudden. It popped on us. It seemed to come from above us. I pulled in my head, crouched and looked. The noise became deafening. And then the helicopter appeared outside the window. It seemed to drift down from the blue sky. It hovered outside the window. It turned. I stared on its profile.

A girl with flaming red hair and dressed in black was alone in the bubble. She looked in on me for a moment. Then she grinned suddenly and waved as the copter lifted and swung out over the gray-green sea. I watched it until it became a speck against the sky and finally disappeared.

Moria Parma was behind me when I turned around. Her eyes were very large. Her fingers found my coat sleeve, clutched. "What—"

I patted her fingers. "I think, honey, I now know how we got to wherever we are."

She did not understand, and I did not attempt to explain. Because in that same second there was the rattle of metal against metal. A key was inserted in the lock of the door across the room. The door swung open wide and two damsels dressed in what appeared to be custom fashioned military uniforms were on the threshold.

The uniforms were perfect fits. The shorts were short. The blouses were tight. The shorts and blouses were an off-shade gray, looking freshly starched. White buttons ran up the blouses to closed collars. Black neckties, neatly triangled, fell from the collars. Black belts, very wide and very shiny, were cinched across interesting fronts to disappear over squared shoulders. Black boots, also very shiny, seemed anchors for bare, smooth, sun-tanned legs. The damsels were pretty and unpainted and expressionless.

The damsels had very black hair. The damsels also carried carbines.

"Ah," I breathed, "the palace guards, I assume?"

Moria Parma and I were taken downstairs. We were made to walk down two flights of richly-carpeted stairs and then through magnificent splendor of the ground floor and into a huge room. The palace guards were silent and cautious. They remained a safe distance behind us. They used the carbines to point when there was a question of route.

We were ushered into a huge room. There were three orange-tinted walls and one glass wall. The glass wall had a glass door. The door was closed. There was no noise. But outside the glass wall and door there was a long swimming pool and sunshine and gaiety and flashing brown arms and legs and a labyrinth of near-naked, covorting female bodies. All very young. All

very fresh-looking. All very suntanned. The bikini was popular.

"My troops," said a rich voice to my left. The rich voice bubbled with soft laughter. "Interesting, don't you think, Mr. Kar?"

She sat in a hollowed, yellow wicker chair. She had to be one of the most striking women I'd ever seen in my life. She sat relaxed, slouched a fraction, knees crossed, one green moccasined foot bobbing slightly. She wore something copper-colored and of pajama design except that it was tailored and gave off tiny sparkles as she breathed. Her skin coloring was a deep brown, her hair a startling white, fashioned by an expert, yet she probably was no more than thirty to thirty-five years of age.

She sat in the yellow wicker chair. She had a drink in her hand, and she looked pleasantly amused. "But do you not think I am interesting, too, Mr. Kar? Do I not tweak curiosity?" The laughter was again soft. "In my veins there is the blood of the Mongolian and the Russian. And I once was married to a Spanish nobleman who was rich and bought this island and constructed this house for me but who died much too early in life—The poor darling drowned off the north shore and—oh, I do believe I'm rambling."

"Ramble on, doll."

"Doll?" Her laughter seemed genuine before she said, "Mr. Kar, I do believe you and I are to get along. Sit. Please sit down. You, too, Doctor Parma." She waved the glass toward another pair of wicker chairs. "What do you prefer to drink? We have everything in this house."

"Pass," I said.

The vision cocked a penciled eyebrow. "Doctor?"

Moria stood without moving, almost without breathing. The vision waited a moment, then shrugged. "Well, sit. Please. Neither of you look comfortable. Incidently, I am called The Princess. I have a name, of course, Ramona, but I prefer the title. Agreed?"

"It's your party," said I.

She continued to look amused. "You intrigue me, Mr. Kar. You appear to have much poise—in a crude sort of way, I admit—but it makes you palatable. I like self-assurance in a man. So few display it these days." She took a moment to cast a glance on the lovelies at her swimming pool, then her eyes returned to me. They were laughing.

"I wonder how my girls would react if I turned you loose among them? They are rather isolated by necessity here, you know. Some of them haven't been off the island in weeks. Some of them haven't seen a man in weeks. We haven't had many male visitors and—"

"Warning, doll?"

"Warning?" She faked being perplexed.

I went to one of the wicker

chairs, sat, wiggled fingers at Moria. She came to the other chair like a beckoned dog. I waited for her to sit then I looked Ramona I-Once-Was-Married-To-A-Spanish-Nobleman square in the eye and offered, "I am the only male type currently taking up space on your little piece of real estate? Is that it?"

I didn't give her the opportunity to answer. I went on, "And if I am a naughty little boy, if I do not answer your questions properly, I get pitched to the—er, wolves, so to speak?"

Our hostess seemed amused all over again. She chided. "Mr. Kar, my girls are gentle girls."

"Sure," I nodded. And then I asked, "Doll, just who the hell are you?"

She took a few seconds to work on the drink. She changed. The amusement disappeared. She became somber, thoughtful. She studied the thick carpeting briefly and then she asked, "Are you being sincere, Mr. Kar? Don't you honestly know me?"

"Sorry, hon."

"You've never heard of the Princess?"

"Only in fairy tales, long ago."

"You've never heard of my organization?"

"Nope."

"I admit we are neophytes, but I have been under the impression you people in your precious Bureau know all things."

"Most, honey. Not all."

"Some day we're going to be a vast organization, Mr. Kar. Worldwide."

"With the cause of mankind at heart, I suppose."

"Sarcasm I do not need, Mr. Kar. You've already lost points by bruising my ego."

"So let's get with it, doll. How come Doctor Parma and I are special guests?"

"Because I want Doctor Utrecht," she said simply.

"Who?"

"Come, come, Mr. Kar."

I spread my hands in a shrug. "Never heard of the gent."

"You, Doctor Parma?" The Princess turned her eyes on Moria. "Do you know Doctor Karl Wolfgang Utrecht?"

Moria sat like stone.

"Or a Jason Sanders?"

That got to her. She jerked. A tiny sound escaped her throat and she lurched forward in the chair. Her eyes bugged. I put out a hand, stopped her from pitching on into the carpeting. Opposite us, The Princess laughed without humor.

"I see you do," she said.

I shook Moria. "Give. Who's Sanders?"

Her lips worked. "My—secretary."

"Huh?"

"We're going to be married. Jason has been my personal secretary for five years and we're—"

It dribbled off.

I muttered an oath as something clicked inside my skull. "And I'll just bet that before you left California you told Jason Sanders where you could be found in case of emergency."

"Well, I couldn't just disappear," she said defensively.

"You've got Sanders?" I asked The Princess.

She looked pleased. She almost shrugged. "Shall we indulge in a bit of simple arithmetic? A given nation, not friendly to the United States, produces a missile with a nuclear warhead. Knowledge of this production is vital to given persons in Washington, D. C.

"Then a man, a scientist, disappears from his normal habitat in East Berlin. Has the scientist gone into hiding? Is the scientist dead? Perhaps he has departed to become a resident among his Red Chinese friends? Or is it possible the United States government has suddenly taken our friend under wing? One probes. One puts one's nose where it does not belong, but one comes up with some interesting happenings.

"One finds, by simple seduction of a certain Pentagon person, that a Mr. Kevin Kar of Amarillo, Texas has recently been out of and returned to the country. One then discovers, through the abduction of and the application of certain drugs to a known United States secret agent, that our Mr. Kevin Kar is exactly the man Washington might send on a mission of kidnaping.

One also learns that there are only three persons in the U.S.A. who might successfully interrogate our German scientist. Two of these persons are found to be in their normal habitats, performing their routine duties. A third, a scientist named Doctor Moria Parma, is not. Can you take it from there, Mr. Kar?"

"Where's Sanders?" I asked bluntly.

"Dead," she said with equal bluntness. "I'm sorry, truly sorry, but it seems that Jason Sanders was not quite the specimen of health he appeared to be on the surface. It seems that with the application of certain techniques by some of my —er, less gentle girls, he suffered a heart attack."

I expected Moria to collapse. She did not. She sat mesmerized. She

breathed but there was little else to indicate she was alive.

"And now?" I snapped.

The princess shrugged again, finished her drink, put aside the glass. "I want Utrecht, naturally. I can use him to gain an end."

"You kill Utrecht, you kill Doctor Parma, and a cecrtain government will be forever grateful? A certain government might even tolerate, finance, propagate your small clan of cut-throats?"

"Not at all. I want Utrecht for barter, Mr. Kar. No more."

"Trade, personally slay. What's the difference? Utrecht is dead in the end, anyway."

"Perhaps," she agreed. "But I couldn't care less about Doctor Utrecht's future health. I am currently interested only in his present health. I have to have him, and I have to have him alive."

"Somebody wants to torture, huh? Somebody wants the big man to know the consequence of—"

"Mr. Kar," she interrupted, "I believe I mentioned that my deceased husband was a Spanish nobleman."

"Yep, doll, you said."

"His father was more. His father had a close friendship with Adolph Hitler. Hitler amassed a personal fortune during his rape of Germany. That fortune was divided into several segments. Some was put away for safe keeping in South America, some in Africa, some in —Spain."

She paused for significance and I asked politely, "Your father-in-law was a keeper of jewels?"

"Not jewels, Mr. Kar. But other things of equal value."

"So?"

"The fortune remains in Spain. In Madrid, specifically."

"Sure, doll."

"My father-in-law, upon his death, told my husband."

"And your husband, upon his death, told you."

"Before his death, Mr. Kar."

"Un-huh. It couldn't be why he died, could it?"

She went on doggedly, "When my husband and I left Madrid we were unable to bring the treasure with us."

I sighed for effect. "And where have I heard this kind of story before?"

"Mr. Kar, I'm speaking the truth!"

"Ah, suddenly your anger is showing, princess."

"Will you listen to me?"

"Ramble on," I said with a wave of hand. "Like you said earlier, you are interesting."

"The East Germans want that fortune!"

"Natch."

"It is the only reason I have not been killed!"

"I'll bet you're going to tell me you are the only person alive today who knows where the treasure is."

"Exactly!"

"Not the only person who knows

the treasure exists, but the only person who knows—"

"I am under constant surveillance, Mr. Kar. My husband and I were before his death. Now I—"

"Honey, among other things, you have imagination."

"Those girls out there," she continued, flinging a hand toward the glass wall and the damsels beyond. "I've personally selected each for my organization. I screened, screened, screened. I know their abilities. I try to be confident of their loyalty. And yet, Mr. Kar, I also know that among them there is one, perhaps two, maybe even three traitors! I know the East Germans! I know they are waiting for me to lead them to the treasure! I know they are waiting to pounce."

She remained seated but the top half of her body shot forward, her eyes were suddenly brilliant and her painted lips were skinned back.

"Now," she said, "do you see why I have to have Utrecht? I'm going to trade him for a fortune!"

"If the East Germans want him that badly."

"Oh, they want him, Mr. Kar. The word is out. They want Karl Utrecht, at any cost. You see, you people have had Utrecht for only a few days and the East Germans and others know he could not possibly have relayed all of his information to your Doctor Parma yet. They know—"

"Doll?" I broke in.

She sat erect. "What?"

"May I remind you? You do not have Karl Utrecht."

"But I'm going to get him, Mr. Kar!" she said, suddenly sounding triumphant. "Because I do have your Doctor Parma!"

I turned that one over in my mind for a couple of seconds and then I asked, "Do I smell an exchange on the horizon, hon?"

"Well," she said, smiling like a cream-fed cat, "Doctor Parma is important to some people. Especially now. Especially since she has had a few days with Karl Utrecht. I mean—"

"I know exactly what you mean," I said wearily.

"And what do you think?" she asked, swelling even more with triumph.

I shrugged.

It didn't deflate her.

"I think some people in Washington are currently open to exchange," she said. "Agreed?"

"Parma for Utrecht. Utrecht for a fortune." I nodded.

"And no one gets Utrecht until I get my fortune. I want an open route in and out of Madrid, Mr. Kar."

"And after? Aren't you afraid that—"

"I'll be impregnable then."

"Wealth does not stop bullets."

"But that kind of wealth will provide a shield, Mr. Kar. A quite effective shield. People. People who will make certain bullets never reach me. People who will die for

me, if necessary. People who surely will—"

"Adolph thought the same thing, remember? And there were others before him. Others since him. They all thought—"

"Margaret? Pandora?"

The princess had suddenly called out. The palace guards had suddenly appeared. And I suddenly had the impression I was being dismissed. I stood. The palace guards remained stoic. The princess smiled.

"Mr. Kar," she said.

"See you," I said.

"I doubt if we will meet again."

"Er—is there something final in that?"

She shrugged. "I believe there is an expression—that's the way the ball sometimes bounces."

"You mean I'm going to have a convenient heart attack?"

She shrugged again.

"Like Jason Sanders?"

Shrug. "Margaret? Pandora? Show Mr. Kar back to his room."

I reached down for the stone-like Moria Parma.

"No," said the princess. "Just you, Mr. Kar. Margaret and Pandora want only you. Miss Parma and I have yet to talk. Girls? Please? With Mr. Kar." And then as I went ahead of the guards out of the room, she added, "And don't scratch the window sill this time, darlings."

Her soft laugh was a bubble, but it sent chills chasing up my spine.

We went up carpeted steps. On the second floor, we were stopped briefly when a door opened and Elizabeth Stone was suddenly in front of me. She looked startled.

"Kevin!" she burst. "What are you doing here?"

Another palace guard appeared behind her and used the muzzle of a carbine to shove her along the corridor. Liz protested, but all that got her was a bruised spine. I watched them go into another room and then I had muzzles in my back. A pair of them.

I TRUDGED ON up the third flight of steps. The girls trudged behind me. I had little doubt about our destination. The pink bedroom. A window. Rocks and the sea below the window. A thought crossed my mind. I wondered how many fruits of murder the seas of the world harbor. Actually.

In the pink bedroom, the girls marched me straight to the window. One stepped around me, began winding a wall handle. The window opened.

"Margaret?" I asked.

She looked at me, almost smiled. "Pandora."

"You wouldn't," I said.

"But we would." And this time she did smile.

"You'd have me fall?"

"With a knot on the head." She nodded. And then she stepped back. "Margaret?"

I went down. I whipped my left

arm against Pandora's middle, dropped on my hands and shot my feet back as a jackass kicks. The feet collided with a body and there was a sharp yelp. I went after Pandora on hands and knees. I caught the handle of the carbine and twisted the gun from her hands. Then I cut her ankles out from under her. She sat hard.

I whacked her jaw with the butt of the carbine and rolled. I expected Margaret to be leveling a gun on me. Instead, she was just beginning to come up from her back. I pitched the carbine at her. It crashed against her face. And this time I was on her before she could come up.

I could have killed her, of course, but who kills pretty girls? I chopped a blow against her exposed neck. She gasped and then was quiet and I rolled from her to sit gasping for air for a moment. Palace guards. I looked on the two inert bodies and snorted. Just another case of women attempting to do a man's job—and failing, of course.

I gathered carbines and girls. I used the belts the girls wore to bind ankles and wrists and then I dumped them on the twin beds. They were snoozing peacefully. I left the pink bedroom. The corridor was empty and the castle was quiet.

I went down steps to the second floor. Liz Stone's actions on my doorstep the previous afternoon still were disconcerting but her surprise at seeing me in the castle today, the fact that she had been hustled along the corridor with a carbine in her back, something the princess had said, made me want to rescue her now.

I went to a door, knocked lightly—as a dame might—then the door opened and I was looking upon Liz Stone's startled keeper.

I whipped the butt of the carbine into her middle before she could scream, brought the muzzle up hard against her head. She pitched back into the room and went down. I started the knockout punch, then held it when her head cracked against the foot of the bed. Her eyes rolled back into her head. She went limp and folded slowly into the carpeting.

Liz Stone sat primly on the edge of the bed, nyloned knees together tight, her fingers folded in her lap, her head turned. She didn't register surprise. She merely said, "Good show, Kevin-baby."

"What the devil are you doing here?"

She stood, smoothed her skirt against slim hips. "I've been hoping you could tell me. Ever since I saw you a few minutes ago, I've been trying to figure it out."

I told her what I knew and she nodded.

"It fits," she said, "like a glove on fingers. Three days ago, a week ago—I don't know when; I've lost all track of time—I was in Washington. I had just completed an assignment in Honolulu, returned to

Washington, checked in with Holly, checked out.

"I was supposed to have a week's vacation. I went to a cocktail lounge, savoring the good fortune of getting that week. I went to the lounge specifically to get as lightheaded as I could get and then keep on going. Andrea came in out of the blue. Andrea I knew in college. Andrea and I proceeded to get lightheaded. That's all I know, darling, but it fits. I know it fits."

"Yeah, baby, it fits. Andrea knew your work. Andrea knew you might know me. Andrea used a pill, a capsule, something, and got you lightheaded, okay. Then Andrea brought you here. The princess pumped you, filled you with juices of some kind and sent you out to do a job."

"Darling, it couldn't be done! A drug that would turn me against my own? A drug that would—"

"Do you have needle marks on your arms?"

She looked. "I have marks."

"Shall we proceed?"

"To where?"

"The princess, natch. She is quizzing a friend."

"You have to turn your back."

"You have a plan, I assume.

"It's forming, baby. Strip."

"What?"

"Strip."

"Get naked, you mean?"

"Liz-doll," I sighed, "it will not be the first time that I have—"

"But here? Now?"

"Strip!"

"You have to turn your back."

"Anything for a lady, natch."

I turned. I listened. I heard rustling sounds. I waited. And finally Liz Stone said, "Okay, I'm naked."

"So dress. See the happy cat on the floor at the end of the bed? Put on the uniform."

"It won't fit."

"Put it on!"

An oath. More rustling. Then Liz said, "Okay, I'm clothed. Satisfied?"

I turned. She had been correct. The uniform fit her as if she was dressed for a clown's role in a circus. But it would get us to the princess.

"Beautiful," I said. "Take up the ladies' carbine."

Liz took up the carbine. I went to the bed, picked up her garter belt. "And just what," she asked, "are you going to do with that?"

"Anyone else, honey," I grinned, "might have been wearing a girdle. But not you. Not Liz Stone. Use the gun. March me downstairs. You are now a palace guard. March me to your leader."

She marched me. I went down the steps and into the huge room with the glass wall. Moria Parma was still there. The princess was still in her wicker chair. The girls were still outside, cavorting at the swimming pool. Liz marched me straight up to the princess. The princess started to protest—and then I had the garter belt wrapped

around her neck and was tugging.

"No noise," I hissed. "Not a squeak."

The princess continued to claw at the elastic across her throat but she did not make a sound as Moria Parma and Liz Stone stared on me.

"We leave the house quietly," I told them.

"And then what?" asked Liz.

"We find a boat—I hope."

We left the castle. We went out a rear door. We walked through a stand of trees. We walked a shore line. I kept a tight grip on the garter belt. The belt kept the princess moving ahead of us. But we did not find a boat.

"And now?" asked Liz.

"So it's a small island," I said.

The princess gagged. "You—can't escape. It's impossible."

She almost made a believer out of me, then I heard the noise and recognized the chop-chop. "Is it?" I grinned on her.

Moria Parma moved woodenly. I reached out and chucked the tip of her chin with a fist. "Easy, baby," I said. "Salvation is on its way. See it, Liz?"

She was scanning the sky. "Coming in out of the west," she said.

"Where will she put down?"

"About a hundred yards from here. There's a clearing."

"Can you take her? You're in uniform."

"Can Sinatra sing?"

We moved up to the clearing and crouched in shrubbery while the

girl in the flaming red hair put the helicopter down and cut the motor. Liz was marching toward the copter before the girl hit the ground. I saw her jam the muzzle of the carbine against the girl's chest and then I moved the princess and Moria out of the shrubbery and trotted them to the copter.

The redhead protested. She didn't want to fly us anywhere. Liz asked for a few seconds, took the redhead out of sight behind the copter. There were various noises including grunts, groans, gasped conversation, tiny yelps. Moria Parma's eyes grew rounder with each noise until I thought they might pop from her skull and then Liz was back with the redhead. Liz looked fit and triumphant. The redhead showed wear and was subdued.

She got into the bubble of the copter and we squeezed in around her. The motor popped a few times,

smoothed out and we lifted to glide over the swimming pool full of lovelies and then we were out over the sea.

"Any idea where we're heading?" I yelled at Liz.

"Florida is about thirty-five minutes away. That's where our pilot has been most of the day. She tells me she's a listening post when she isn't flying. There's some Coast Guard guy with a big mouth. He keeps her posted about the doing of the Guard in this area. That way the princess always knew when there was going to be an inspection of her island and she could hide the things she didn't want seen, including her girls."

"Neat, Princess," I shouted, but she said nothing. The garter belt around her neck didn't allow her to speak.

Our pilot did something up front suddenly and we veered sharply off to the right. Moria screamed, the princess jerked and Liz Stone cursed and caught a handful of red hair. The pilot stabbed air with a finger. And then I saw the plane swooping in on us. It made a pass so low over us I thought the jockey had ideas about knocking off our rotor blade.

"What the hell?" I bellowed.

Our pilot bubbled. Liz put an ear near her and listened, then straightened and looked grim. "Coast Guard," she yelled. "They're moving in on the island. That's why Red here came back, to warn the princess. Word is out that all is not kosher on the island."

The Coast Guard plane swept over us again. I heard the rattle of a machine-gun.

"A warning burst!" Liz shouted. "He thinks we're attempting to escape! Look below!"

I looked, saw the cutter down there, found the Guard plane making a wide swing off in the distance.

The plane was roaring back.

"Okay," I yelled at the redhead. "Put us down!"

She stared at me over her shoulder.

She looked frightened and confused.

"Down!" I bellowed. "It's what the air jockey wants! Put us against the water! We're going to jump!"

"Kevin, you're nuts!" Liz yelled.

"I'd rather get wet than shot, doll. You?"

No one wiggled. I tapped the redhead on the shoulder and pointed down. We went down, hovered above the choppy sea. The cutter was off to our right now, maybe a hundred yards away.

I saw that it was a Coast Guard vessel and I could see people on deck.

"Liz," I yelled. "Go."

She shrugged, shouted, "You're nuts, Kevin-baby, but I love you," and went out of the bubble.

I watched her go down into the water, then pop to the surface.

Moria Parma was next. She didn't want to go, but I pushed her. She flopped into the sea. I saw Liz go after her, take her in tow. They seemed to struggle for a moment, then they were apart and treading water.

The princess resisted. She screamed an obscenity when I took the garter belt from her neck. She attempted to swing on me. I pitched her from the bubble, waved good-by to our pilot and went after the princess.

The water was cold and rough. I bobbed crazily, spotted Liz and Moria. They were moving off toward the cutter. I saw a boat being lowered from its deck. I looked up. The copter had moved away, was heading toward Florida, an escorting plane, its guns silenced now by our strange actions, herding it like a mother hen.

I looked for the princess, found her stroking off in the opposite direction toward China. I shrugged and swam to the lifeboat. The Coast Guardsmen were being very attentive to Liz and Moria. Why not? It isn't every day a man can pull two beautiful women from the sea.

I asked a guy to help me aboard and almost was ignored.

Holly, the Bureau chief, was aboard the cutter. His face remained blank while he took in Liz and I. His lone concern seemed to be for Moria Parma. He had her hustled off to warmth and dry clothing, then he said, "You two enjoy your swim?"

"H-Holly. I'm freezing," Liz chattered.

"But perhaps the water cleared your heads?" he suggested. "Perhaps you will again remember to constantly remain on guard, never to be hoodwinked by a good looking female or"— He swung his eyes to Liz Stone—"an old college friend!"

Neither of us said anything. We merely stood there, humbled and shivering.

"Andrea finally talked," he snapped.

Okay, so we knew what had brought him.

"And Doctor Parma and Doctor Utrecht are going on a long ocean voyage, aboard a battleship," he continued. "We should be able to have confidence in the U. S. Navy, don't you think? I mean, whose going to whisk them from under our noses aboard a battleship?"

"Liz, honey?" I rattled.

"Y-yes, baby?" she chattered.

"D-do you know where we can get a j-job selling shoes?"

Holly stomped away from us. "Where's that other dame?" he bellowed. "Where's the princess?"

"She doesn't want to come aboard, sir," said a sailor. "We had to put a line on her."

"Thank God, someone knows how," said Holly.

It was a rundown, utterly useless old farm, not fit for man or beast to live on. But it knew how to raise one staple crop—Murder!

ON THE FARM

by BEATRICE S. SMITH

I ASKED LARS, "How much farther is it?" I wondered how and when I was going to tell this character I married that I thought he had rocks in his head. Oh, I had problems all right, but, one thing, I had no intention of committing murder. Good Lord, I wasn't that desperate. Not then.

"Only a mile or so more." Lars glanced over at me, his eyes as clear as the lakes of Minnesota, which is where he came from.

"It isn't very cheerful-looking around here, is it?" I said.

It wasn't. A rundown farmhouse or two, neglected fields, scraggly old pine trees. To tell the truth, I wouldn't have been impressed no matter what the landscape looked like. I just don't take to lonely landscapes. I was born and raised in Miami, Florida. Until I met Lars, the closest I'd ever come to the rural scene was at Western movies.

In fact, that's where I met Lars. He popped up in front of me in the aisle at the Palace, all six feet four of him, and bowled me over. Literally.

We were married two months later, which was really too soon and I found myself leaving civilization in a pick-up truck. The fact that he was driving a truck should have warned me, but I was a push-over as far as Lars was concerned. All he had to do was whistle and I went leaping.

Meadowood was where he took me. Meadowood, population thirteen hundred and fifty-two, where the most exciting thing

that happened all day was at noon when the factory whistle blew. That was three and one half months ago.

Now here I was bouncing along a dirt road in the same old pick-up to look at a farm Lars had decided to buy. A chicken farm. Big joke, I thought. Chicken farms had gone out with Ma and Pa Kettle.

I never should have pretended to be somebody I wasn't. That was my first mistake. Several others followed in quick succession, all too personal to mention. So here I was, me and my big mouth and big stomach, jogging along a country road on my way to nowhere.

"This is sand country," Lars was saying. "Not too prosperous. That's why I'm able to get the place for practically nothing." He smiled his big Bugs Bunny smile and looked at my stomach with a look that can only be described as fond.

"It'll be a great place to raise a family," he said softly. "Say, Candy, did I tell you about the trout stream that runs through the back forty?" Lars went on. And on and on and on,

I smiled and nodded at the proper times, but there was this tight feeling inside of me. You know, the sort of feeling you have when you put on a big act to please someone, knowing all the time you're a faker and wondering exactly how and when the axe will fall.

"Our land begins here." Lars waved his hand toward a barbed wire fence which had tangled itself half-heartedly around a couple of rotting posts. "The buildings are just ahead."

Buildings! An unpainted barn with a crumbling foundation. A sagging chicken coop. A part of a corral. A dilapidated corncrib. And an ancient privy. Buildings? Ha!

"There's the house!" Lars cried. I blinked. It was unbelievable. A dreary gray part frame, part log house with most of its windows boarded shut, sitting on its tired haunches behind a clump of wormy-looking apple trees. The porch drooped and so did the roof. And so did what little spirit I had left. "You mean someone is actually living here?" I said to Lars.

"Sure. And all by herself most of the time, too. Mrs. Claussen's her name. Her husband's dead—died about ten years ago. The old lady is pretty frail herself. That's why the place is so rundown. There's a stepson around someplace, but he isn't much good, I hear. He can't be or he'd take better care of things. Mrs. Claussen's a good woman, though. You'll like her, Candy."

I nodded, my face too stiff to smile. Lars took a firm grip on my arm as we went up to the back door. If he hadn't, I think I might have high-tailed it straight back to Miami.

"Good place for a rape," I said,

trying to make a joke. Some people get tics. I always joke when I'm nervous.

Lars chuckled. "Yes, isn't it? And the inside is just about as bad. I'm afraid little Daisy isn't much of a housekeeper."

"Daisy? Is that Mrs. Claussen's name?"

"Daisy Drew Claussen. How about that?"

"Daisy Drew. It sounds almost like a stage name."

"Smart girl. It is. Daisy used to be in show biz," Lars said, knocking on the door.

"The woman who lives on this farm? You're kidding!"

"Nope. As a matter of fact, from what she told me, I gathered she used to be a pretty good little actress."

"No fooling?"

"No fooling," Lars knocked on the door once more, but no one answered.

"That's funny," he muttered. "I told Mrs. Claussen I was bringing you out to see the place today. She seemed particularly anxious to meet you." Lars flashed his toothy smile in my face and rubbed his nose in my ear. How he could act like that at a time like this I haven't the faintest idea.

"Knock again," I told him, pulling away. "Maybe Daisy didn't hear you." Or maybe, I thought to myself, oh happy day, Daisy has decided she doesn't want to sell after all and we can go back to Miami where everything is pink and white and populated.

Lars knocked once again and when he still didn't get an answer, butted open the door with his shoulder. Some man, my Lars. That's why I was so silly about him, I guess. "Mrs. Claussen, you here?" he called. Still no answer.

With a certain queasiness of the stomach, I followed Lars into the dark kitchen. Now I don't come from a family of model housekeepers or anything like that, but the mess in this house was beyond belief. Dirty dishes were stacked in the dishpan on the cupboard. Half piled, that is. Most of them were simply scattered around. A big old wood range covered with soot and rust stood against the chimney wall. One door hung from its hinges.

In the center of the room was a round table covered with a fly-specked oilcloth, hanging askew. A mildewed trunk was backed against a window, its contents dumped out. Cobwebs stretched from pillar to post. And mouse dirt, if that's the term, covered everything.

It looked like a setting for a midnight horror movie or maybe an Italian sex film.

"Let's wait outside until Daisy comes back from wherever she's gone. I've never been very good at breaking and entering," I said.

But Lars, as usual, paid no attention to what I said. He just kept

wandering around, calling Mrs. Claussen and beckoning me onward and upward. I followed him, good wife that I was, down one hall and up another. Everything was dark and gloomy and smelled to high heaven. In one room were a couple of ancient theater posters and that was as cheerful as things got.

I shivered and muttered something obscene to myself. Lars couldn't expect me to live here. Why, there wasn't even a noon whistle to relieve the dreariness.

"Let's get out of here," I said, which was really, as things turned out, probably one of the smartest things I've ever said.

"Mrs. Claussen won't mind our being here. Besides, the place is almost ours. All I have to do is sign the papers." Lars frowned. "I don't remember it being quite so messy the last time I was here, but—"

He smiled, all white-toothed and bushy-tailed.

"But it's nice, isn't it?" Nice. I looked at this husband of mine, sure he was kidding. He wasn't. Not the least bit. "All it needs is a little paint," was what he said and he was perfectly serious.

I took a deep breath. "Lars, I—

"You'll see what I mean as soon as we get the boards off the windows. The woodwork is really beautiful."

"Couldn't we just use it for kind of a fishing cottage? Everybody has two homes these days. Part of the time we—"

"Fishing cottage!" Lars snorted. "What do you think we are? Millionaires? This is a farm, Candy. A working farm."

Lars always gets red in the face when he's excited and it isn't becoming, I thought, wishing rather absent-mindedly that I'd noticed that flaw in him six months ago. A fly caught itself in a spider web and buzzed near my cheek. I slapped at it as hard as I could.

"I can't stand this place," I said in a fairly steady voice. "Please, Lars—" Then my voice broke and the tears started. I couldn't help it. I'm simply not the rugged type.

"Don't be silly, Candy."

"Silly!" I shrieked the word and it seemed to let loose all the things I'd been keeping inside of me for so long. "Ever since we were married I've done everything to please you. Yes, and even before that, too. I got pregnant, left home, left my friends, gave up parties, quit my guitar lessons, learned to cook and scrub and whatnot. The works, baby! And never once have you thought about me and the way I felt."

"That isn't true," Lars said, his voice very quiet. "Besides, I thought you liked the out-of-doors. Before we were married you said—

"I know what I said," I sobbed. "But it was a lie. A big fat lie. I'm a congenital liar and I want to go home."

Lars looked down at me, his blue eyes colder and hotter than dry ice.

"Grow up, Candy," he said, then turned and walked toward the downstairs bedroom. He was still looking for the old lady, I guess. It's a lead-pipe cinch he didn't care anything about me at that moment.

I stood where he'd left me, shaking so I couldn't move. The farm meant a lot to Lars. I knew it did. But what about me? Didn't I have any rights? So I'd lied to him. Big deal. What difference did that make now? Grow up, he'd said. Very funny. I felt about a thousand years old.

And now he expected me, pregnant and all, to move to this broken-down, God-forsaken shanty in the middle of nowhere and raise chickens. Chickens! Me. Well, I couldn't do it, that's all there was to it. I was no Ma Kettle. Lars knew that.

But did he? Would he even understand what I was talking about? We were so different, Lars and I. But I loved him. That was the worst part. I loved every inch of the big dumb Swede, red face, buck teeth and all. Why couldn't I be the kind of wife he needed? Somebody tall, with big arms and a double chin. Like Mrs. Claussen probably was. Like—

"Candy!" Lars shouted and I flew. He was kneeling on the floor in what looked like a bedroom beside something on the floor that looked like a heap of dirty laundry.

"Is—is it Mrs. Claussen?" I gasped, clutching my purse tight. It was heavy and I was glad. It was the only solid thing in the whole wide world as far as I was concerned.

"It's Mrs. Claussen all right," Lars said gently.

"Is—is she dead?" My voice squeaked up a whole octave.

"No. Not yet anyway. It looks as if she's had a heart attack or something. Look at her eyes." He turned to me. "There's no phone, so I'll have to go get a doctor. You stay here until I get back."

"Stay here? Lars, I can't. I feel sick right now. I—"

"We can't leave the poor thing here alone, Candy." Lars picked up the limp bundle and placed it on the bed, covering it with an old quilt that was lying on the floor. "You sit here beside her in case she comes to. I'll be back as soon as I can."

He hesitated, then leaned over and kissed my cheek. "You can do it, Candy." Lars is very corny sometimes.

I reached for him. "Lars, I can't. I'm sorry, but I can't. You stay here. I'll go for the doctor."

He put his hands on my shoulders and sat me down in the chair next to the bed. "Candy—" There was worry in his eyes, that I could see, but it didn't help me much. "Candy—" he began again. "There isn't anything else we can do. You're in no condition to drive right now, especially on these roads and in that old truck. I—we can't take a chance on losing that baby of ours, now can we?"

"I can't stay here, Lars, no matter what happens. Don't you understand?" I was desperate now. Well, hysterical might be a better word.

Lars looked at me, bent toward me, even squeezed my arm a little, but what he said was, "I'm sorry, honey. I'll be back as soon as I can." And then he scooted out the door.

I tried to run after him, but my knees wouldn't stay stiff, so I hunched down in the chair and listened to the truck race down the road. It was the loneliest sound in the world. The noise grew fainter and fainter until there was nothing. I clung to the arms of the chair, black leather it was, and waited for Dracula to appear. But nothing happened.

Without turning my head I glanced at the bed. There were no sheets, only a dirty mattress, a dirty pillow and a faded homemade quilt. But draped over the foot of the bed was a yard or two of bright red satin. It looked like a stage prop of some kind that someone had arranged for the color effect. It didn't fit in with the rest of the room at all. But then hardly anything would have except a hungry rat.

The musty smell of decayed wood, dirty clothing and rancid food was everywhere. But here and there was a look of better, happier days. A bit of lace on a doily, a faded family photograph on the wall, a leather-bound bible on the dresser. There was no happy sound however. Just raspy breathing from the bed and the tick of a dusty shelf clock on a ledge in the corner.

Spooky was the word for it and panicky was the way I felt. Moving only my eyes, I forced myself to look at the heap under the quilt.

The body was so tiny it hardly made a lump. The narrow face was

yellow and wrinkled with lavender shadows under the high cheekbones. On each side of her head, ropes of white hair lay draped behind the ears. One hand rested across the chest, the other over it, the way hands are arranged in coffins. And two eyes stared into space. Doll's eyes. Round, pansy-colored and fixed.

I shuddered and things became a little gray around the edges. I had the distinct impress of being present at the demise of some weird little character from an old horror story.

She lay motionless, but I was fairly certain she wasn't dead. Deep in those strange eyes was something. I don't know. Something almost too real to be true. It's hard to explain. Of course I'd never been witness to a death bed scene before, that may have been the explanation.

Suddenly one of the small thin hands, the one on top, made a feeble kind of gesture of some sort. My heart bumped against my tonsils. Daisy was pointing at something. What? The violet eyes stared beyond me, but not far beyond. I held my breath, cold saliva in my mouth, the kind you have when you're scared sick.

I sensed his presence before I saw him. A tiny movement. A shadow. Without looking around I got my knees together and stood up, turned, slowly, a scream in my throat. Then I stopped breathing altogether because there he was. Dracula. Or some close relative. Right behind me.

Though the light was dim, his face was as clear as a photograph. Clearer, really. I can still see it. A heavy-jowled face, pocked with tiny chicken pox scars. Or acne or smallpox, I don't know. Little colorless gray pig eyes. Several days' growth of black beard. Beads of sweat on his thick upper lip. His voice thick and slurred.

"Beat it," he growled, waving a revolver in my face.

We stood there staring at each other for an eternity or two. I felt giddy. I even felt like laughing. This couldn't be real. The man's mouth opened, his eyes gleamed. The clock was still ticking, but otherwise it was as if time had run out. Even the raspy breathing from the bed had stopped.

I let out my own breath, took another. I had to. I was suffocating. Part of my brain was solid panic, but for no reason and just like that, the other half, the part that was in this horror picture, became cold and clear.

It was like the time I played a part in the junior play. I'd been standing there on the stage in front of everybody, stagestruck, and suddenly, out of the blue, I remembered all my lines.

"Beat it," the villain growled once more.

This was my cue. The man was scared. He didn't know my part,

didn't know what I was supposed to do. But I knew. Keeping my eyes on his, I moved my left hand and squeezed my right hand tight around the clasp of my purse. His eyes dropped to my left hand the way I knew they would. Now! My brain screamed.

I swung my purse with all my might and hit his arm, the one that was holding the gun.

The big weapon flew through the air. He looked at it, started for it, then lunged at me, his big hands going for my throat. I ducked, naturally. This big lug couldn't choke me. He wouldn't dare. It wasn't written that way. For some curious reason, this was my only thought as I streaked across the floor, weak knees, big stomach and all.

He didn't seem to grasp what I was doing and almost before he could turn around I had the gun, held it flat in my hand, my finger on the trigger. It was very heavy. This surprised me. I'd never held a gun before in my life, but I held tight, ready to blast away if I had to.

The man peered at me, snorted. An ugly sound. "It ain't loaded." He grinned at me with broken yellow teeth, then he turned his back and shuffled toward the bed. "What you think you're doin', old woman?" he rumbled.

She stared at him with those huge eyes of hers. Or was she staring at me? I didn't know. I only knew I couldn't let the poor soul be hurt. "Don't touch Mrs. Claussen. She's sick!" I yelled.

The pig cursed, then bent over and grabbed Mrs. Claussen by the shoulders. She didn't make a sound. I didn't either. Quietly, without hesitating a second, I crept close, raised my arm and cracked the revolver at the base of the man's skull as hard as I could. It was a horrible sound. He slipped to his knees, his head bent.

Just as he hit the floor, quarts of bright red blood began to ooze from the gash in his head. Or at least it seemed like quarts. I stood over him, ready to crack him another good one if I had to, believe it or not. But he didn't move. He never would again. I could tell.

I waited for several minutes. You do this after you've just killed somebody. Then I left him and went over to the bed to see how poor Daisy was doing. Her eyes were closed now and one hand hung limply over the side of the bed. I picked it up. Such a worn little hand. I rubbed it. One of the cold fingers fluttered and I rubbed harder.

"Thank you," Daisy Drew Claussen whispered.

"That's okay," I said.

She shook her head. "Eldon was terrible, even as a child."

I thought at first she'd flipped. "Eldon?" I repeated carefully.

"My stepson," she said glancing carelessly at the dead man on

the floor. Then she sat up. Sat up, mind you, with her back straight, her shoulders back, her head high. And in her hand, the hand that was under the other one all the time, was a pistol.

"Here," she said. "Shoot him, just to be sure he's dead."

The room began to wave. "N-no, he's all right," I said.

"Oh, that's good." Daisy sighed. I didn't say anything. I couldn't. "Tom, my husband, you know, was a dear, wonderful, hard-working man, but he had no head for business, bless him," Daisy said in a nice conversational tone.

"He left no will, so the farm was part Eldon's, you see. And Eldon refused to sell. He was rather stupid. A birth defect of some sort, I believe Tom told me. Anyway, I couldn't let him have Tom's farm. Not after the way my darling Tom worked his fingers to the bone to make it look like something. So—" Daisy examined her own hands and sighed again as she turned those pansy eyes of hers on me.

"Your husband is a fine young man. He'll have this place back in shape in no time. Eldon would have turned it into a pig sty." She reached out and patted my arm. "You did a fine job on Eldon, my dear. I knew you had it in you the minute I heard you come in the house. Of course your husband could have done it, too. It wouldn't have mattered to me. But I knew one of you would protect me when that brute came charging in here."

She smiled a sweet old lady's smile, glancing at the clock. "My timing was almost perfect, too, though Eldon took a mite longer than I'd anticipated." Once more she sighed. Then for no reason that I could see, she sank back against the pillow.

I blinked, not really certain I hadn't imagined the whole thing. Then Lars came from some place.

"My God! What happened?" he shouted, running to me, hugging me, patting me all over in that cozy way of his. There was another man standing behind him with a black bag in his hand.

The doctor, I presumed. I started to tell them both exactly what had happened, but the words wouldn't come out.

"Candy!" Lars cried again. Candy. My name. What a funny name for somebody who has just been tricked into smashing in a man's skull, I thought to myself, wondering rather dazedly if perhaps living on Daisy's farm would be so bad after all. Actually, after all she'd done for her man, it seemed the least I could do.

"Candy! What happened? Tell us, for God's sake!" Lars was yelling again.

"A burglar," I lied, pointing to Eldon. Funny about lying, the more you do, the easier it gets. Then because I wasn't prepared to answer any more questions, I fainted.

THE SHARPSHOOTERS

Up above him, his deadly rival swung on the flying trapeze. He smiled. Soon he would be down—dead . . .

by
RICHARD O. LEWIS

THE CIRCUS band switched into the lively strains of *The Billboard March,* and the elephants began lumbering rapidly away from the three rings, each grasping with his trunk the tail of the one just ahead of him.

The clowns burst forth to do another interlude of walk-arounds. The sharpshooter, with the aid of two uniformed workmen, was quickly setting the scene for his act in the ring directly in front of Madro.

Madro, sitting in the front row of the reserved seat section, paid little heed to what was going on before him. His eyes were on the performers' entrance to the big-top just beyond the center ring, waiting for her to make her appearance.

The band made a sudden cut-off, and she came in, precisely on cue. She was a tiny, beautiful thing with a white and blue robe draping down from her slim shoulders. Madro watched her every move, watched her approach the rope ladder, feasted his eyes upon her as she discarded her robe and began to climb.

She wore white tights as usual. They fitted her lithe body like a thin, extra skin. He watched the sway of her hips and the movement of her shapely legs as she ascended the ladder. She reached the small trapeze platform high up in the shadows and stood there, waiting for the next cue.

Her partner, a muscular and handsome young man, had reached his own platform opposite to her. He, too, was clad in the conventional white tights.

If this story of the big top sounds even more chillingly real than usual, there's a good reason for it. The author, Richard O. Lewis, was a famous circus clown. He knows the smell of the greasepaint, the crowd's roar. After reading this, you will too!

Madro's eyes swept back to the girl again. He wanted her more than he had ever wanted anything before in his life. Since that day, a week or so ago, when he had fixed the tire on her trailer and she had smiled sweetly down upon him and had been profuse in her thanks, he knew he had to have her. With her, there would come complete success and happiness at last.

But she was out of reach. He couldn't have her. Not as long as she had that partner. And that was one of the reasons Madro had been coming into the big-top so often lately, waiting—almost praying—that something would happen. . . .

The sharp *crack* of a rifle distracted him for a moment. The sharpshooter directly in front of him had gone to work, shooting cigarettes from between the lips of his girl helper in rapid succession from standing position, sitting position, from between the legs, with the aid of a mirror—the whole routine.

Madro was not impressed. He could do all those tricks himself—and more. He had managed his own shooting gallery with circuses and carnivals for nearly twenty years and could handle a rifle with the best of them. In his own establishment, he could knock down the moving ducks as fast as they made their appearance without even bothering to take careful aim—and he often did, just to attract the hicks.

Sometimes he did it with a mirror, his back to the ducks. That was always a good come-on to get the local yokels in the mood to show off their own talents of marksmanship.

Madro's eyes swept upward to the girl again. She seemed remote, completely out of his grasp—unless, of course, something should happen to her partner.

Although Madro scarcely admitted it, even to himself, his brain had been scheming for the past several days, trying to devise ways and means of eliminating the obstacle. Once he had considered tampering with the rigging. But he had given up on that idea almost immediately. Such tampering could easily endanger the life of the girl, end in complete disaster.

A sudden puff of white entered Madro's line of vision. The girl in the ring was now tossing small glass balls into the air, and the sharpshooter was blasting them one after the other. The balls must have been filled with a fine talc, for on each direct hit, they exploded into a miniature cloud of white.

Laughter rippled through the crowd as Dopey, one of the clowns, sprang into the ring, wrestled the rifle from the hands of the sharpshooter, spun around three times in clownish manner, then began blasting the balls out of the air as fast as the girl could toss them up while the sharpshooter stood by in mock amazement. Dopey tossed

the gun back to its owner, bowed low to his audience, then bowed again in the direction of the sharpshooter—at the same time squeezing a hidden plastic bottle of water under his arm pit so that a jet of water went up and out of the top of his red wig and directly into the face of the waiting marksman.

Increased laughter and applause followed Dopey from the scene. The band struck a final chord, and the ring master's voice cut in over the amplifiers.

"La-dies and gentle-men, we now direct your attention to the flying Royals, Ariel and Adam, the greatest trapeze artists of all time, who are about to—"

A spotlight of blue flashed upward to bathe the girl with a flood of light that set the sequins of her tights into sparkling diamonds. A ray of red struck the man on the high perch opposite her. The band swung into a lilting waltz.

Madro watched the slim girl shoot through space from her own swinging trapeze in rhythm to the music, watched her grasp the waiting hands of her partner, swing through a great arc with him, then back and turn and release and glide once more through the air to grasp her own trapeze just as it swung into range.

She was as beautiful, as graceful as the music of the waltz. She was everything Madro desired. He hurt deep inside for the very want of her.

And, as usual, his brain was striving and plodding. There had to be a way!

His thoughts turned to Dopey and the glass balls. The gun had been pointing in the general direction of the young man high up in the big-top—at a safe angle.

But if something could possibly be done to the sights of Dopey's rifle. . . .

Half the guns in Madro's gallery were "sucker" guns. The front sight of each could be set into one of two positions. In the first position, the gun shot straight and true. But a flick of the thumb could set the sight into the second position, a very small fraction of an inch to the right. In this position, the gun shot nearly a full inch to the left.

Madro used the "sucker" guns when betting against the prowess of the hicks. He would let them win a few bets; then, when the stakes got high enough, he would unobtrusively slip the sight into the second position and clean up. If the hick squawked about the gun being untrue, a quick press of the thumb would set the sight back into its original position. The sucker could test it for accuracy in any way he chose—and incidentally be goaded into placing another bet.

Now, if the front sight of Dopey's rifle could be set out of line—

Madro shook his head to get rid of the idea. No matter how much he tampered with the sights, the

accuracy of the gun could be thrown off not more than a foot, not nearly enough to accomplish the objective.

Then a new thought struck him. The clown had adopted the name Dopey.

Now, if Dopey could really *be doped* just before his ball-shooting stunt.

Once again, he shook the idea from his head. A doped Dopey would be a hazardous thing, a danger to all concerned—

The act came to a thunderous conclusion as Ariel, leaving her swinging trapeze, made herself into a tight little ball and did two forward somersaults, stretching out at the very last moment to clutch the hands of her partner.

Madro left his seat immediately, ducked under the reserves, and went out under the side wall of the tent. Circuses were not for him. Circuses were for hicks, for suckers. He had come only to feast his eyes on Ariel.

As he came in sight of the gallery, he saw Millie leaning as usual against the side of the flimsy structure.

She was regarding her fingernails listessly, her jaws busy with a wad of gum.

Her straight black hair could stand combing.

For a fleeting moment, Madro invisioned Ariel standing there. She would not be idle. The local gallants would be flocking about, attracted by her beauty. The rifles would be cracking away. Business would be brisk, tenfold what it normally was.

And once her partner was out of the way, Ariel would be working there. There was no doubt in Madro's mind concerning that point. She would be in need of a job; he would offer her one at a good salary.

It was as simple as that. Performers had to eat, come what may.

Millie looked up at him as he approached, cold suspicion lurking in her dark eyes. "Where you been?"

Madro ducked under a supporting railing and into the gallery. "Around," he said.

"Been in there watching her again, haven't you?"

Madro turned his back on her and picked up one of the rifles. "None of your business where I been," he said.

"You've been watching her more 'n a week," Millie prodded. "Ever since you met her. I watched you."

Madro ejected the shells from the rifle and picked up a cleaning rod, his swarthy face growing rapidly darker.

"He's young and strong," mused Millie. "Real strong. He'd be a hard one to face up to."

Madro rammed the rod viciously down the gun barrel.

"You couldn't face up to him.

You'd have to make it look like an accident. And you don't know how."

Madro wheeled about, his dark eyes blazing.

"Then you'd have to get rid of me. . . ."

Madro raised the rifle, menacingly.

Millie shrugged her shoulders and ducked out beneath the gun counter. "I'm going to make some coffee," she flung over her shoulder.

He watched her pick her way among the tent ropes of the neighboring concessions as she made her way toward the trailer they had shared for the past five years, his eyes smouldering. Yes, she was right. He would have to get rid of her, some way, if and when the time came.

He went back to work on the guns again, cleaning and polishing, his mind a turmoil of conjectures. Yes, it would have to look like an accident.

It would have to be that way. Accidents in the circus were common, taken in stride.

Thoughts of Dopey and the glass balls kept popping in and out of his brain. He had to hand it to Dopey; it took real marksmanship to smash those balls in rapid succession the way he did. During the entire week, Dopey had not missed more than three or four. Madro wondered how much practice it would take before he could

even come close to equalling the feat.

Suddenly something clicked in his head. If *he* were shooting the balls instead of Dopey—

The thought left him cold. He stood as if in a trance, the gun in his hands forgotten, his forehead beginning to break out with clammy beads of perspiration.

Now that the solution of the problem had shown itself, he was frightened. It would be murder. Yes, but it would look accidental. And there would be no way to pin it on him!

Millie came back as the performance in the big-top ended and the crowd came pouring out. Ballyhooing started up here and there about the lot. A few stopped at the gallery to test their talents.

Madro went through the late afternoon and early evening automatically. He didn't even bother to drum up business. His mind was seething with crazy ideas. Well, he would look over the situation carefully and let the final decision take care of itself.

Just before the beginning of the

night performance, the crowd on the grounds began to thin out as usual. There would be a lull now until after the performance, then the crowd would come out again, and there would be another brief hour of activity.

Madro slipped out beneath the counter of the gallery.

"Going to watch her again?" Millie chided.

"I haven't had anything to eat," he told her.

He went directly to the trailer, heated the coffee, and made a cheese sandwich. The sandwich was dry in his mouth, and he had to wash it down with the coffee. He waited until he heard the strains of the elephant music drifting out of the big-top. Then he picked up a flashlight, paper and pencil, stepped out into the night, and searched out Dopey's trailer. He entered it quickly and flashed on his light.

There was a chair, a makeup table, and a mirror along one wall. A scrapbook lay on one end of the table. He picked it up, thumbed through it, and was rewarded to find a photo of Dopey in full color. He ripped the page from the book, studied the colors against the tubes of grease paint on the table, and made hurried notes.

He went through the performers' entrance into the big-top just at the finish of the elephant act. The clowns were starting their walk-arounds, and Dopey was making his way to the ring, where he would do his usual stunt with the rifle.

Madro studied him carefully, watched the way he carried himself, noted the shuffling, reeling walk. He noted the way Dopey took the gun from the hands of the sharpshooter, how he reeled around a bit before beginning to shoot at the glass balls. Out of the six or seven the girl tossed into the air, Dopey missed one.

When the clown came back toward the performers' entrance to make ready for his next walk-around, Madro took careful note of the baggy trousers, the coat with its pattern of huge multicolored checks, the red wig, the grotesque artificial feet. There would be problems, of course.

He left the big-top just as the band swung into the lilting waltz of the trapeze act.

The next show town was a fairly large one, and after setting up the gallery, Madro got into his car and drove directly to the business district. In the fifth drugstore he entered, he got the nose putty, paints, and a suitable red wig. He had a pair of baggy pants of his own that would be passable. But the checked coat and the artificial feet still posed a problem.

For the next few days, immediately after set-up, he drove out into the country or into a secluded park and practiced putting on the make-up before a mirror. He had some

difficulty in getting the red nose molded into the right shape and getting it to stay in place, but the rest came fairly easy—the huge mouth of white turned down at the corners in sadness and outlined in black, the burnt-cork cheeks, the white lines radiating out from the eyes to give them a startled, starry look.

Madro knew little enough about the circus itself, but he did know that once a clown developed a satisfactory makeup and costume, he rarely changed it. It became his trademark. And so, all he had to do was to make his face look exactly like the face in the colored photo.

Three nights later, Madro was ready, at least as far as his outer physical aspect was concerned. But on the inside, he felt cold and jittery. He didn't know whether or not he had enough courage to go through with it. Yet, all was in readiness, and the decision was now more or less taking care of itself. He had come too far to back off now. If he wanted the girl, he had to go through with the thing—or forget about her entirely, something he knew he could never bring himself to do.

Madro, wearing red wig, baggy pants, and makeup, entered Dopey's dark trailer a few minutes before the start of the elephant music. He stood back against the wall near the door, a piece of broken tent stake clutched tightly in his hand, his heart thudding against his ribs.

Dopey came precisely on cue, just as the elephant music started, to dispose of some of his props and to get the plastic bottle of water and to get it hooked up with the tubing that snaked up from his arm pit to the top of his red wig. He flung open the door, hurried in, and reached for the light switch.

But his fingers never quite reached it.

Madro swung the tent stake down hard on his head, and Dopey slumped to the floor with a small sigh. It took but a minute to strip the limp form of its checked coat and to transfer the grotesque feet to his own sock-clad feet. He didn't bother about the bottle of water. He wouldn't need it. The act would not have its usual ending.

Madro entered the big-top just as the elephant act finished with its usual flourish of music and the clowns started their walk-arounds. Mimicking Dopey's flat-footed, reeling walk, he made his way slowly toward the ring, where the sharpshooter was just beginning his act. He paused once to look upward. Ariel was on her high perch in readiness.

Even at that distance, she looked beautiful and desirable. It wouldn't be long now before he would have her for his very own, take her under his protective wing. Petri, his body white against the high, shadowy background, would be a perfect target.

Madro's plan was quite simple.

After he took the rifle from the hands of the performer, he would reel about in clownish manner. And during one of the turns, he would raise the rifle to his shoulder, take quick aim, and squeeze the trigger. During the excitement that would surely follow Petri's plunge to earth, he would exit beneath the nearest tent wall and into the night.

He would toss the coat and feet into Dopey's trailer in passing and go to his own trailer where he would wash up and hide all evidence. And Dopey would have a hard time convincing anyone that he had not fired the fatal shot. The bump on his head would give him no alibi; he could have sustained that by falling against something when he hurried back into his trailer.

Madro reached the ring and saw the girl begin tossing the balls upward for the sharpshooter.

Now that the thing was at hand, he began trembling. Beads of perspiration began to ooze out beneath the grease paint. He wanted to wipe those beads away with the back of his hand but knew he couldn't do it, not without smearing his make-up.

Gaining a reasonable amount of control over himself at the last moment, he took a deep breath, leaped over the ring curb, and clutched the gun from the man's hands.

He reeled about once, orienting himself. The next time he turned, he brought the gun up quickly, took a hurried but careful aim, and squeezed the trigger.

He heard and felt the quick response of the gun and made ready to drop it and run just as soon as the man began to topple earthward.

But nothing happened.

Petri still stood on his platform, gazing out across the abyss of nothingness that separated him from his partner, quite oblivious of whatever was happening in the remote region below him.

It had been a clean miss! He had been too nervous!

Madro was dimly conscious that the girl had tossed the first ball into the air for him. He wheeled and fired—and missed again!

Blanks? Was the gun loaded with *blanks?*

Another ball shot upward. Madro took careful and determined aim at it, fired, and blasted the ball into a puff of white.

No, not blanks. You can't shoot balls out of the air with blanks!

Another ball went up. But Madro did not aim at it. He aimed directly at the white torso of the man on the perch. He would not miss this time; the target was too large for that! He squeezed the trigger. The man did not topple from the platform. Bewildered now, Madro took careful aim and fired twice more in rapid succession.

He caught a flash of movement out of the corner of his eye and wheeled about, just in time to see

Dopey—the real Dopey, minus coat and floppy feet—come leaping over the ring curb toward him, his grotesquely painted face distorted in anger.

Panic clutched Madro. He hadn't hit Dopey hard enough, hadn't taken into sufficient consideration the cushioning thickness of the red wig. Now his disguise would be ripped from him, for all to see.

He dropped the rifle and ran. Rapid flight was his only hope now. He cleared the ring curb in a single leap and made for the nearest side wall.

A rifle cracked suddenly behind him, and instant pain struck him. Spurred by pain and fear, he leaped and screamed and increased his speed. Again the sharp crack, and again the biting pain. And there was a roar of laughter from the crowd. The hicks thought it was part of the act!

He reached the side wall, rolled under, scrambled to his feet again, and went running and leaping over tent ropes, the pain biting and stinging at every move.

He dashed into his trailer, slammed the door behind him, and fell upon his cot, face downward, sobbing.

He had been the hick, the sucker, the one who wasn't "with it". He knew it now. Now, when it was too late!

Millie would have to do the teardown alone tonight, would have to take care of things. The show would leave without him in the morning. He would have to find a new spot for the gallery, some place where Millie could run it until he got on his feet again.

He sobbed against the pain that was in him, clinched his fists against the pillow, and cursed himself again for the hick he had turned out to be.

Naturally, the rifle used against the glass balls could not be loaded with leaden slugs! Slugs would rip through the top canvas of the tent, cut it to shreds and ruin it before the season was half over! Anyway, no sharpshooter alive could consistently burst those glass balls with the use of conventional ammunition! It just couldn't be done! Those shells had to be loaded with something that would be extremely effective at close range then, very rapidly, lose its effectiveness and become harmless! Yes, he should have known!

He sobbed again and hoped that Millie would stick with him and take care of the business. He wondered how long it would be before she became worried about him and came searching for him.

And he wondered how long it would take a doctor to probe from his buttocks and thighs all those pellets of tiny bird-shot that had lodged there—how long it would be before he was able to sit comfortably in a chair again.

Floating from the big-top came the strains of a lilting waltz.

SEE NO EVIL

All night, uncaring, he had listened to the voice of murder and done nothing. Another night came . . .

by GEORGE BELLEFONTAINE

THERE HAD BEEN a recent rain shower and the empty street glistened beneath the dull street lights as Wilbur Harding forced one tired foot ahead of the other.

It was quiet, only the sound of his footsteps.

He shivered and had unpleasant thoughts, but he was near the rooming house and that was a consolation.

In all of his fifty-two years, he had never been afraid of the night; he had been conditioned by loneliness, but he had this chill and this strange feeling that distorted the usual scene. He shrugged and laughed silently at himself.

He rounded a corner and he could see the grey building where he lived, and the darkened window of his room above the alley and the meat market next to that. He quickened his pace.

He heard a muffled sound and he halted at the grey building's front door. He stood on the steps, listening.

Again the muffled sound, it was coming from the pitch-black alley.

A drunk, no doubt. He shrugged, entered the building, climbed the stairs to the second floor and entered his room. He turned on the lights, plugged in the kettle, washed and changed to his cotton pajamas.

It was a small bed-sitting room with very little furniture. But he was allowed a hotplate to make coffee and a toaster and a frying pan and that made him self sufficient, the way he liked to be. But the room was stuffy, so he opened the window overlooking the alley and he heard the sounds again. This time it was a loud moaning and there was a sound of a struggle. He leaned out the window and stared into the darkness.

"What's goin' on down there?"

"Please, hel—" The plea was cut short.

Now his eyes were more accustomed to the dark and he could make out two figures. One was definitely a woman. The other figure was above her—a man, yes—and his hand was over her mouth.

"Get out of there!" Wilbur shouted. "It's after two in the morning."

He waited, but the forms below were unmoving. Then the man made a sudden jerking movement and the girl struggled and cried. Finally the man got up and ran from the alley into the lighted street. All Wilbur saw was a flash of red hair and something gleaming.

"Hel—help, please I'm hurt—"

Wilbur froze, his eyes fixed on the dark lump in the alley. She was moving, alive, but she was making terrible sounds in her throat. Wilbur thawed, pulled his head inside the room and lowered the window and the shade. He unplugged the kettle, turned off the lights and went to bed. He needed a coffee, but he must go to sleep. That was important now.

Even with the window closed he could hear the girl moaning in the alley. He twisted, turned, buried his head beneath the pillow.

What would a respectable woman be doing out this late anyway? She deserved what ever she got. Besides, he didn't want to get involved. There would be questions and probably a trial and he had heard how some men who had stopped to help were accused of the crime themselves.

None of that for Wilbur Harding. He didn't ask anybody to help him and he wasn't obliged to help anybody.

That's the way it was and that's the way he wanted it. *Fini.* Good night.

But it wasn't that easy and he got very little sleep. It was the siren that woke him the next morning. After that there were many voices and finally the knock on his door. He got up, pulled on a robe and answered the door.

"Lieutenant Carter," the big man said. He glanced over his shoulder at another plain-clothesman behind him. "You check the tenant above this." The other man nodded and left.

"What is it?" Wilbur asked, rubbing his eyes.

"Do you mind?" Carter said and pushed his way past Wilbur. He crossed the room and lifted the blind of the window above the alley."You get a great view from here."

"I don't mind it," Wilbur said.

Carter turned, his eyes hard, lips taut. "What's your name?"

"Wilbur Harding."

"Where do you work?"

"The *Sentinel.* Night shift. Circulation department. We bundle the papers and see that they get on the trucks so you can read your paper in the morning."

"Yes, yes. Did you say night shift?"

"Yes," Wilbur said.

"What time did you get home last night?"

"We knock off at two. Takes me about five minutes to walk home. Look, do I—"

"A woman was murdered last night, Mr. Harding. Right down there in that alley. You must have heard her screaming. The killer stabbed her several times. You must have heard or seen—"

"Look, Lieutenant, by the time I get home I'm a pretty tired man. I don't see or hear anything. I just go to sleep."

"What's the matter with you people? A woman was brutally murdered and nobody saw or heard anything."

"I'm not the only tenant," Wilbur said, frightened and angry.

"No," Carter spat. "And you're no bloody different."

"I'm a taxpayer," Wilbur said and added, indignantly, "You have

no right to talk to me that way. I'll see that you—"

Carter hurried across the room, reached for Wilbur but stopped abruptly. "She was a young woman, Mr. Harding. A waitress, walking home after work. She was a human being and some monster cut her up so badly that she bled to death. If you saw anything, anything at all, it would help greatly."

"I saw nothing. I heard nothing. I was asleep."

"This man has killed three other women. Don't you want to see him caught?"

"Of course I do, but I already told you, I saw nothing."

Carter's huge hands fell limp at his sides and he sighed hopelessly.

"Very well, *citizen,*" Carter said and started toward the door. He stopped. "We'll want to question you further. I'll be in touch."

"I saw nothing!" Wilbur shouted, but Carter didn't hear because the big man was gone and Wilbur was staring at the door. Finally he broke away and went to the window.

They had just finished taking pictures and now they were taking the body away. Wilbur stood there, watching the men at work for a long time and after that he went to a restaurant and had lunch.

The rest of the day he spent in the park and he thought about the girl and he heard her pleas and that strange sound in her throat. He could have helped her, he knew. He may have saved her life. But that's the way he was. He asked no help and gave no help, it had been that way since he was old enough to leave the orphanage and go to work.

It was a long afternoon and he was glad when it was time to go to work. The topic of conversation at work was the murdered girl of course, but even there he refused to discuss it with the others.

"But you live there, Wilbur. You must have seen something. What did the corpse look like? What questions did the police ask?"

Questions, questions . . . over and over.

Finally the presses were rolling and soon the papers were bundled and on the trucks. Two A.M. now. Wilbur left for his room.

This night was clear with a bright moon and plenty of stars. He walked slowly, thinking about the girl—the girl. Why couldn't he forget the bloody girl?

As usual, the street was empty and Wilbur made a turn and the grey building was in sight. He was about fifty yards from the building when he heard it.

The sound of footsteps.

Wilbur stopped, glanced over his shoulder and saw the man. The police were trailing him. Did they think he was the killer?

"I know who you are," Wilbur said. "I'm going to report you, hear!"

"I guessed that," the man said, advancing from the shadows.

Then Wilbur saw it, the flash of red hair and then the gleaming knife in his hand.

"No!" Wilbur cried. "I saw nothing. Honest. I told them nothing."

The man was closer.

Wilbur screamed and started to run. The man caught up to him just as he reached the front door. Then Wilbur felt strong arms shoving him away and into the dark alley.

"Help me, somebody—I'm being murdered!!"

Several windows opened and lighted the dark alley, but then they closed and the alley was dark again.

"No!" Wilbur shouted, the man reaching up, knife in hand. "Help! Somebody!"

He closed his eyes and screamed and screamed.

COMING SOON—Complete and Exclusively Yours—

WHO SHOT THE GENERAL IN THE BACK?

A Thrilling New JOE RODRIGUEZ Long Novelet

by TOM H. MORIARTY

This great short novel brings back to our pages dynamic Joe Rodriguez, the copper-turned-espionage agent who knows all about life—and sudden death—in war-ravaged Saigon. Here is his most baffling, most peril—packed assignment of all, the guarding of a man who was so hungry for fame that he courted Death itself to get it!

Her World of Voices

"Screen all calls," they had told her. But what do you do or say—if your caller happens to be Death?

by

JAMES McKIMMEY

CONNIE ADAMS walked briskly through the hotel lobby to step into a switchboard room. She felt a pleasurable excitement, as she had every morning during the seven years she had worked here.

In her world of voices, there was always the anticipation of something eventful happening.

She drew out her modern headset from a locker, inserted the ear receiver and plugged into the board efficiently, as the graveyard operator left.

The day shift was operated by two girls. Betts, a new operator, arrived minutes later. She was a young girl who did not like the job.

Connie felt compassion for her, because Betts had two small children. But then Connie, when she was married to Pete Rusher, had not expected to work for a living all of her life either.

"Morning," Betts said dimly, plugging in with reluctance. Side by side, they began taking calls.

An hour later Connie listened to Betts pick up a call from a house phone: "Sorry, sir. But I can't give you the room number." Connie saw the girl's mouth tighten and knew that the customer was being insistent. "I'm sorry," Betts said. "It's the rule of the hotel!"

The girl pulled the plug from the jack. "Rules," she said in disgust.

"Have to have them," Connie said positively. It was a definite philosophy she had applied with unerring rigidity, these last years.

When she had divorced Pete, she'd been forced to get a job. She found one as an operator trainee. With experience, she had come here, to this mountain resort in the Sierra, where she had hoped the work would be more glamorous. It had been. And she'd turned herself into the finest operator she could be by determining in the beginning that rules were absolute supports to completing her perfection. She had not, to her knowledge, broken a single one in all of the seven years.

"I don't see why we can't give out room numbers," Betts complained.

"Have to protect our guests."

"It doesn't make sense."

Connie felt a pity for the girl's naivete. It was not that she was so sophisticated herself. Since the divorce, she'd led a proper, simple existence, invariably walking directly home to her neat cottage on late afternoons, to feed a small dog, then herself, spending the evenings watching television or reading.

But seven years in a large hotel had moved her considerably beyond the innocence that Betts was now demonstrating.

"A guest checks in," Connie said. "How shall we say it? Incognito? He wouldn't like having the wrong person knock on his door unexpectedly, now would he?"

"I never thought of that."

Connie smiled tolerantly, then took a call from the front desk.

"Roger here," a male voice said. She laughed lightly. "Hello, Bill. Can't fool me, you know."

It was true, she knew, making

his connection: she had an absolutely true ear. Some of the employees continued to try to disguise their voices, to trick her; but they had never succeeded. She supposed—wondering why she was thinking of Pete so much this morning—that even that had been a conflict, years ago. She'd loved to listen to music, but Pete owned a tin ear. Well, she thought, what difference did that make now?

The small light indicating Room 418 glowed. She jacked in, then said, as the rule dictated, "Good morning. Hotel at your service. May I help you?"

"What's the time, operator?"

She felt shock. She touched her upper lip, then reached out to turn the rack which held cards bearing guests' registration information. 418 was listed under Mr. & Mrs. A. Harris.

"Nine-forty-seven," she said, keeping her voice calm. But fury was making her tremble inside.

"Okay," he said sleepily and hung up.

Her mind raced back to the day when she'd found a San Francisco motel receipt in his jacket, made out to Mr. & Mrs. A. Harris, dated on a day Pete had said he was going to spend down the Peninsula; he was attempting to set in operation a new phase of his still unsuccessful building business.

She had waited until his next stated trip, then taken a bus across the city to find his car parked by one of the units of the motel. She was waiting when they came out. The girl had been young, well-shaped, with a vacant expression—

Pete Rusher—A. Harris. He had not even shown the inventiveness to change his false registration!

She was very pale now, just able to keep her hands from shaking as she took new calls.

"You look funny," Betts said.

"I'm fine." She forced herself to regain her composure. She had not believed, until she'd heard his voice again, that she could still feel such emotion. Yet she'd known, through the years, that she'd allowed her resentment to grow.

In the beginning she'd attempted to forget him entirely. She had even returned her last name to its maiden form. It was impossible for her to avoid remembering those hard, wasted years she'd given him, a careless, easy-going man with a singular lack of sensitivity, who had taken all she could give, then repaid her by going to a motel with some cheap thing.

It was impossible for her to avoid thinking that she would have received her rightful reward, as the wife of a man whose raw but natural instinct toward business maneuvers had finally plunged him to the highest sort of success, had he retained his loyalty to her.

But, at the brink of that success, he'd cheated her of everything. Her settlement, because

he'd been nearly penniless at the time, had been negligible.

Since, despite brushes with the celebrated who frequented the hotel, feeling a vicarious touch on their existence, she knew in her heart that she would never go further. She simply remained Connie, who had, in order to ease her frustration, given everything to her work.

The light above 418 went on again. She said, "May I help you please?"

A girl's flat voice responded dully: "Room service."

That, she thought viciously, was the kind of voice she knew terribly well too, as she knew all sorts of voices, and the moods they represented.

"I'll connect you," she snapped.

She envisioned newspaper pictures of his second wife: a handsome woman, always expensively dressed, beautifully coiffed, wearing a contented look. That was not she, in 418. He was cheating on her too.

Her anger rose again. Betts turned to look at her in timid concern.

"Sure you're all right?"

"I ate breakfast too quickly."

Betts nodded, taking the statement at face value.

It had been inevitable, she thought, that he would eventually come here—probably inevitable that he would come in this fashion. Where was the second Mrs. Pete Rusher now, she wondered? Had she yet discovered one of those receipts carelessly left in a pocket of one of his jackets?

A light over a lobby house phone number flashed. Connie connected. "Switchboard."

"Could you tell me the room number of Mr. A. Harris?"

She heard the unmistakable inflections of a woman born to a wealthy environment. She also heard a tone of murderous anger.

She hesitated only a moment, then said, "Four-eighteen." She looked at Betts. "Front desk never keeps registrations straight."

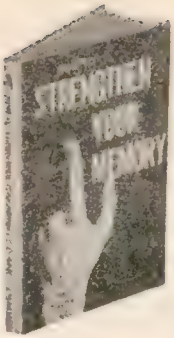
She used the next twenty minutes to assure herself that in seven years of dedication she had earned the right to break one rule, once.

Harry, the house detective, picked up the telephone in Room 418. Pete Rusher had been shot three times, the girl twice.

When her shift ended that afternoon, Connie found a freshness in the air outside she had not noticed in some time. She stopped at a small grocery on the way home and bought an expensive steak in place of her customary chop. In her cottage she felt secure and content.

She ate with appetite.

1



2

3

4

11

SEE WHAT $1.00 WILL BUY!

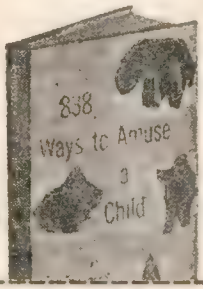
5

DO IT NOW!

Use coupon below to select these exciting dollar bargains. The supply is limited. Send your order in **NOW!**

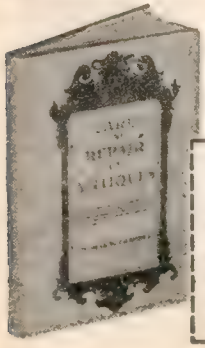
10

6



8

7



9

Gentlemen: Please send the items whose numbers I have entered below. FILL IN NUMBERS CORRESPONDING TO TITLES HERE, IN NUMERICAL SEQUENCE.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SELF HELP LIBRARY
Box 3141, Grand Central Station, New York 10017
☐ Payment Enclosed
☐ Check for Money Enclosed
Please include a 25c charge for handling and mailing expenses.

NAME (Print) _____

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

INSTANT REAL

They were my enemies, and nothing could change them. But I had a secret weapon which might even the score . . .

by FRED S. TOBEY

THERE'S NOTHING unusual about people turning their radios on in the morning as soon as they get up; I realize that. In fact, I know *why* people have this compulsion to turn their radios on—the motivation, I mean.

After all, I flunked psychology at one of the best colleges. But does that mean I have to put up with an infernal racket on the other side of my bedroom wall, practically next to my ear?

This couple, Frank and Edie Morgan, moved into the apartment next to mine and started playing their radio early in the morning. Both of them worked. They got up about an hour and a half apart, and both of them had to have the radio blasting. His alarm would go off about six, and right away the commercials and the news would start shaking the walls. The shock almost rolled me onto the floor the first morning, maybe because I had laid the body out about four in the morning, after a party.

By and by the noise quit and I heard Frank leave, and I turned over gratefully and went back to sleep. But around seven-thirty the Morgans' alarm went off again and then—whammo!—the radio came back on, full volume. Now Edie was getting ready to go to work.

I haven't anything against working, for people who like it. Personally I *don't* like it, and I usually sleep pretty late in the morning. My father claims that's why I flunked out of college, but fortunately he doesn't have a reform complex. If I complain about the allowance he gives me it's mainly to keep him off-balance; to spend very much more I'd have to get a yacht, and I hate the water.

After college gave up on me I moved into this neat one-room utility in a new apartment block in the city—good view of the park, maid service, beige wall-to-wall carpeting and all that. Things were going quite well till the Morgans moved in.

They were about my age—twenty-five or so, that is—and at first I thought I was going to enjoy having them around, because this Edie is a real dish, just tall enough, black hair hanging straight down and then curling in—you know that effect?—skin with just a little olive tone and big wide-set dark eyes.

When I saw her standing in the doorway of their apartment that first night I began picturing myself rapping on her door to borrow an egg while Frank was away at work, but of course that was before I found out she had a job herself, as private secretary to some big wheel in an advertising agency.

Wouldn't you know she'd have to be a career girl? I don't mean to say it discouraged my good neighbor policy, but it certainly fouled up the timing.

The day the Morgans moved in, they flagged me down for a drink as I was going by their door, and I got hooked for helping them push furniture around. It was a low trick to play on me but I didn't mind too much, because I was getting a kick out of watching Edie in motion. I found out quite a lot about them that night, their work and so on.

"Frank has to get up at this ungodly hour to get to work," said Edie, "because he's a buyer at the General Plastics plant up north of the city. I keep trying to talk him

into getting a job nearby, but he thinks he's got a great future in plastics."

"What Edie hasn't mentioned," said Frank, "is that I also think she ought to quit fooling around with a career and settle down to being a housewife. Then we could move up north near my plant."

"Oh, sure," said Edie. "We'd get along just great on what you make, wouldn't we? Anyhow, I need the mental stimulation I get at the agency. A girl needs something besides a kitchen to look at all day."

Oh, well. If married people don't have anything to argue about, they'll invent something. Right?

While we were moving things around, Edie stopped in front of me and took my necktie in her fingers.

"I like that," she said. "Different. I wish I could get Frank to wear ties like this, but all he ever wears is stripes. He thinks the striped tie is a sort of badge of the business world."

Frank had stopped half way across the room and was looking at us, holding a chair, not saying anything.

"I've been getting my ties down at Zelka's on Front Street for years," I said. Naturally I got a kick out of Edie noticing the tie. When a person takes pride in his appearance, as I do, it's always a pleasure to realize that someone like Edie appreciates it.

Frank finally moved along, still without saying anything. We quit pushing things around pretty soon, because Edie couldn't make up her mind where she wanted some of the stuff.

It was the morning after the furniture-moving session that I found out about the Morgans' radio habits.

The time to nip something like that is in the bud, so after Frank and Edie got home from work that night I went and rapped on their door.

Edie came to answer it, packaged in a loose Oriental robe that touched just enough places to give you a stimulating set of fix-points for the whole picture. I almost forgot what I wanted to talk about. But in a second Frank showed up in the background.

"Oh, hi!" he said. "Come on in. I was just mixing a martini."

Even with Edie around I didn't think I could take another hour of furniture-moving.

"Thanks," I said, "but I'm going out. I just stopped by to ask if you'd put the soft pedal on your radio in the morning. I like to sleep late."

They looked at each other, then back at me.

"Radio?" said Frank. "*Our* radio? We just turn it on for the news when we get up."

"Sure you do," I said. "On and off, on and off, for a couple of hours. By that time it's a miracle if I can get any more sleep."

Frank had pushed his way

around Edie and was standing half in front of her. I hadn't realized before what a big frame he had, six feet two if he was an inch, and all muscle. The pair of them made quite a picture standing there in tandem. U.S.A. 1967. American Phonic.

"Say, listen, Bill," said Frank, "it can't be news to you that some people have to get up and go to work in the morning!"

"Maybe it's news to you," I said, "that some people don't have to. I happen to be one of them, and I like to sleep. I'll appreciate it if you'll keep the volume down on that radio."

Only one of Edie's eyes was showing from behind Frank's shoulder as I ended the conversation by turning and heading for the stairs, but I was certain that big brown eye flashed me a message of encouragement.

Next morning I believe Frank really did tone the radio down a little, but do you know what Edie did, that exasperating minx? She not only turned the radio on full blast but she went off to work and left it on! I don't mind a little high spirit in a girl—it can even make things more interesting—but I really thought that was going a little too far with the game.

I had to call the janitor, finally, to get him to go in the Morgans' apartment with his pass key and turn the thing off.

That night I rapped on their door again. This time I didn't get invited in for a drink.

"Look," I said, staring straight at Edie but finding it harder by the second to stay mad at her, "you did that on purpose this morning, leaving the radio on when you went to work."

"Gee, did it bother you?" said Edie. Her eyes were sparkling and I could see she was having a hard time to keep from breaking into a giggle. "I remembered it after I got to the office, and wondered if it was annoying you."

"Thanks a bunch," I said. "I had to get the janitor to go in your place and shut it off."

"Oh, yeah?" Frank cut in. "Well, he'll hear from me about that. He's got no right to come barging in here when we're not home. Anyway, what the hell is wrong with you, Bill? Everybody listens to the radio. How are you going to know what's going on in the world if you don't listen to the radio? Are you some kind of a nut or something?"

That tipped it over. A nut, he said!

"Nut!" I cried. "You're calling *me* a nut? Well, I've got news for you, Frank. That radio isn't clueing you in on what's happening, it's just sucking you in for the advertising. If they told you what's really going on outside you'd jump back into bed and pull the covers up!"

"Now I know you're off your rocker," Frank said, "and that's all

the more reason to mention something that's been bothering me. I don't like the way you've been giving Edie the eye, Bill. I don't like it and I want to make sure you get one thing straight in that pointed head of yours. You or anybody else that makes a pass at Edie wins a free trip to the hospital. Is that clear?"

Some men certainly are small-time jealous bustards. I'm not exactly a bantam for size, and as a matter of fact I've always taken a certain pride in my physique, but on the other hand I'm not one to encourage a fight just for the exercise. So I took care not to exchange glances with Edie this time as I turned away.

"Just keep your radio down," I said. "That's all I'm interested in. Just keep it down."

Well, they didn't keep it down, so I went to work on an idea that occurred to me. One of the radio stores had been advertising a sort of focusing microphone, called a "listening device." I went out and bought one of them. What an amazing gadget! By aiming it out my apartment window I was able to pick up conversations more than a block down the street, and over the next couple of days I picked up some good material.

"For instance, I recorded a couple of drunks in the park telling each other off. Then I got a real break when there was a bad automobile accident at the main intersection a block away. I got a recording of the crash and a woman screaming—starting to scream when the cars hit and screaming on up and up like a fire siren.

I don't know anything about radio, but I paid plenty for my hi-fi equipment and when I turn the volume up, it puts out. I leaned my speaker right up against the wall next to Frank's and Edie's apartment, and the next morning just before Frank's alarm was due to go off I turned the sound on with the volume right up to max. First the drunks came on with a lot of four-letter words, then the crash and the woman screaming.

Getting up that early almost killed me, but the results were worth it.

First I heard some scrambling around in the next apartment, then there came a banging on my door and Frank and Edie were standing there, he in pyjamas and she with the Oriental robe clutched around her, both of them looking as if they had just seen the end of the world from ten feet away.

"What the hell is going on in here?" said Frank. He brushed past me into my place, and Edie followed him. I closed the door after them.

"Glad to see you," I said. "I'd like your advice on my new experimental broadcast, the 'Instant Real Program.' Maybe you heard a little of it just now?"

Frank looked around. "There

was a woman screaming in here," he said. "Jesus, I thought you were killing her."

"No," I said, "she was being killed down the street in an automobile. It's my idea for an improvement on that slop you've been getting on your radio—brings the *real* world right into your bedroom."

Frank stood there blinking, looking from me to the tape recorder. I half expected him to take a swing at me when he caught on, but he fooled me.

"Some idea," he said at last, "but for me you need to personalize it more."

"Like how?" I said.

"Record a drowning."

I admit I should have seen it coming, but after all, he still looked half asleep.

"Drowning?" I said. "I don't see—"

"Hang the tape recorder around your neck and jump in the river," said Frank. He turned and pushed Edie out the door.

The next couple of mornings were better. Maybe the Morgans turned the volume down or maybe I just began to sleep through the noise. It's amazing what the human animal can adapt to.

Anyway, I didn't bother with any more Instant Real broadcasts, but I did keep on playing around with the listening device, which fascinated me. There was a button attachment for contact listening, and one night I put the button against the wall and was surprised to find that I could hear Frank and Edie talking.

I listened for a couple of minutes to some dull shop talk from Frank, and then just when I was about to knock it off I suddenly picked up the information that Frank was going away next day on an overnight trip for his company, to a buyers' convention!

Holy cow, I thought, what if I had happened to stay out myself the next night, not knowing! Poor Edie might have been all alone. I was so impressed with what the listening device had done for me that I decided to use it next night so I'd be sure to know when Edie got home, and perhaps get an idea of the right moment to rap on her door for a friendly visit.

The night after Frank Morgan got home from his trip I heard a good deal of talking and laughter in their apartment; it didn't take any listening device to tell that Frank and Edie were entertaining guests. But I was more than a little surprised when I answered a rap on my door about ten o'clock and found them standing there, guests and all.

The guests were a distinguished-looking man of forty or so and a lady of similar age or maybe a little older, the lady's face being singularly devoid of expression—a lack that I suppose may have resulted from drinking. I got the impres-

sion that all of them were somewhat awash.

"Ah, there you are, Bill," said Frank. "Like to have you meet a couple of friends of ours, the Kennisons, Carl and Dot. Carl and Dot, this is Bill Harper—man I was telling you about."

I nodded. "Glad to meet you," I said. "Come on in."

They did. Kennison was ramrod-straight, with iron-grey hair and a meticulously-trimmed moustache, a perfect movie prototype of the successful business executive. His wife was expensively dressed and her face was carefully made up, but even as she acknowledged the introduction her dead-pan face didn't crack a smile.

I wondered why a man of such obvious attractions would marry a woman like that. Money, I thought.

"You might have heard us speak of Mr. Kennison," said Frank. "He's Edie's boss at the office."

That was it, of course—I remembered the name, now. Kennison was vice president of the advertising agency where Edie worked as his secretary.

"I guess you remember," Frank went on, "that Carl is an advertising executive. Well, I happened to mention that idea of yours for a radio news broadcast—you know, the one where you include the sound of the cars crashing and so on—and he thought it was terrific, wondered if you'd explain it to him and play that recording you made."

It wouldn't have taken a swami to figure out what had been going on. Frank had been telling Kennison about this "nut" who lived in the next apartment, ridiculing me to make himself a big guy with his wife's boss. As I turned to wave the four of them toward my divan I saw, in a mirror, Frank giving Kennison a heavy wink. If I had had any scruples that would have finished them off.

"Gee, Mr. Kennison," I said, "are you sure you want to hear about this thing? The idea isn't very well developed yet."

"Fascinating idea," said Kennison. "Fascinating." It struck me that, behind his smooth executive front, he was just barely making it over the highballs.

"Well, you see, Mr. Kennison—and by the way, why don't you all sit down there on the divan, sort of like an audience?—you see, radio news gets kind of watered down, usually, but if we had microphones all over the place to pick up random happenings, we could broadcast the hot bits—rape, fatal accidents, and so on—just the way they actually happened. Instant. Real! Get it?"

Frank was getting impatient. "Play that thing you woke us up with, Bill," he said. Go ahead."

"Oh, that one's out of date now, Frank," I said. "I've got a better one, the one you gave me the idea for. Remember?"

"I gave you the idea?"

"Sure. You said it needed to be personalized. See what you think of this."

I struck a pose, as if I were holding a microphone.

"Friends of Schizophrenia," I said, "welcome to your Instant Real Broadcast!" I switched on the tape recorder.

It wasn't what they expected, that was certain. Just low voices mumbling at first, then there was some laughter and one of the voices began to come through more distinctly, as if the person speaking had turned toward the pickup. It was a woman's voice, saying intimate things.

Frank spoke up from the divan. "Hey, Edie," he said, "that sounds like your voice. You been making tapes for this guy?"

The woman's voice on the tape continued. "Sh!" it said. "We'll have to keep kind of quiet, Carl. We mustn't let Fatty suspect you're here."

Fatty! Can you imagine my feelings when I heard her say that the night Frank was away? All right, maybe I've been exercising a little less and eating a little more since I left school, but—*Fatty!* Standing there now, watching the four of them, I remembered how I had run to look at myself in the mirror. *Fatty*, she said, and after all the wonderful things I had been thinking about *her! Fatty!*

Frank's voice brought me back to the present.

"Damn it, Edie," he said, "that is you talking. I'd know your voice anywhere. What the hell's going on here?"

A man's voice came from the tape now, resonant and clear.

"Who's Fatty?" it said. "Someone you're hiding in the closet?"

Mrs. Kennison spoke up from the divan.

"And that," she said, "is my husband. I would know that voice anywhere." I looked at her, expecting the pan-face to be showing some emotion at last, but it was as blank as ever.

"Fatty is the nut in the next apartment," the woman's voice on the tape was saying. "It's what Frank and I call him. He's got a grudge against me for leaving the radio on, and—"

I was watching Frank, enjoying the sight of the light dawning.

"Personal enough, Frank?" I said. "I made this one the night you were away. I happened to have the contact mike against the wall there."

Edie jumped to her feet.

"You bastard!" she said. "You fat sneaking bastard!" She made a lunge for the tape recorder but

Frank reached out with a ham of a hand and yanked her back. He listened another second or two and then he started in my direction. I had my hands on a chair, ready to swing it, but I didn't think I'd have to.

"Behind you, Frank!" I cried. "Look who's leaving!"

Frank turned to see Kennison heading quietly for the door. Edie's boss had lost most of his alcoholic fog and all of his distinguished attitude. Frank reached him in one leap, swung him around and let him have a mighty haymaker on the jaw. Kennison and his teeth made it to the floor in a photo finish.

I had my chair aloft and ready for Frank's next move, but I needn't have bothered. He stood over the prostrate Kennison for a second or two and then he grabbed Edie and hauled her off to their love nest.

Mrs. Kennison, who had continued to sit impassively on the divan, now rose, walked over to where her husband lay, and looked down at him. There was an expression on her face at last. It was one of pure joy.

I suppose the next tenants may have a radio, too, but I'll face that when I come to it. One problem at a time. Do you happen to know what's the best thing for taking bloodstains out of a beige wall-to-wall carpet?

READ—This Great New Spy Novel in the JUNE Issue of:

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

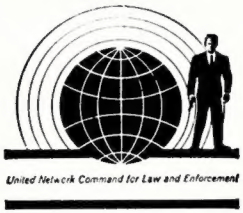
THE UGLY MAN AFFAIR

A New NAPOLEON SOLO and ILLYA KURYAKIN Novel

by ROBERT HART DAVIS

It's the king of all spy-action magazines, the top of the TV spy show ratings—and one sampling of its stories will tell you why! Each issue, a brand new U.N.C.L.E. full-length novel! Each issue a prime selection of the world's great new stories!

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE



AS A MIKE SHAYNE reader, you are used to the best in crime action stories. May we call your attention to another top rank magazine, the sensational rating-topping *The Man from U.N.C.L.E. Magazine.* Like Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* features in each issue a brand new novel targeted to your reading pleasure and starring the greatest cast of spy-adventure headliners ever assembled anywhere! During the short but exciting magazine life of this brilliant publication, it has taken the espionage-adventure reading public by storm. It will do the same thing to you!

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER-ARENA'S smashing nationwide television show, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, now in its third record breaking year, stars Napoleon Solo, Illya Kuryakin and Alexander Waverly. Like its television companion, this magazine of the same name will be 1967's spy-action reading sensation. That's not a prediction—it's a promise!

REMEMBER—*The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* will continue to give you a new full length U.N.C.L.E. novel each month —plus stories of quality by world-renowned authors. And the famous *Department of Lost Stories*—the most widely acclaimed magazine feature of the year!

Alexander Waverly and his two key agents live with danger and sudden death. You'll thrill with them in their never-ending fight against the forces of evil and mighty THRUSH. A suggestion! Reserve your next copy now at your newsdealers. Some issues have sold out very early!

The Newest Magazine Sensation!

On Sale Everywhere

THE *GIRL* FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE

YOU'VE READ the best—now thrill to the very best: "The Girl From U.N.C.L.E. Magazine." As a steady reader of Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine—and of course you are—you are used to and expect the very best in crime action reading. We can without qualification recommend "The Girl from U.N.C.L.E." as a fitting companion piece, dedicated to exciting reading and containing in each issue a full length novel written especially for your reading pleasure and feauring the greatest cast of spy-adventure stars ever assembled anywhere!

BY THIS time you will have seen and thrilled to the nation-wide television show "The Girl from U.N.C.L.E., starring glamorous Stefanie Powers as April Dancer and Noel Harrison—Rex's son—as Mark Slate, two new young U.N.C.L.E. agents. In this new magazine of the same name, of course Napoleon Solo, Illya Kuryakin and Alexander Waverley will appear, in each lead story, along with these brilliant new characters.

And remember—"The Man From U.N.C.L.E." has headlined all video entertainment for over two years, just as our magazine of the same name has headlined all crime-spy reading. Now something new and devastatingly glamorous has been added, the swingingest, coolest agent ever to bat an eyelash at Solo and Illya and Thrush at the same time, and not give an inch.

ALEXANDER WAVERLEY'S special memo to his staff says, "Don't let her sex and her beauty mislead you. She's five feet, five inches of dark haired danger!" And, we may add, of reading delight. So—watch for "The *Girl* From U.N.C.L.E. Magazine" at the newsstand where you purchased this issue of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE. Better yet, reserve your copy now. You'll be glad you did!